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SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS

FOR THE

SUNDAYS AND PRINCIPAL FESTIVALS

OF THE

CHURCH - YEAR.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN.

VOL. II.

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SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS.

FIRST SERMON FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT.

1 COR. 11. 23-26. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread : and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood : this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come.

According to a time-honored usage, more people come to the Lord's Table at this season than at any other time during the year. This fact, together with the urgent necessity that on a stated day the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper be plainly taught the people from the pulpit, prompts us to consider now the words of St. Paul, which you have heard read in our text. From these words we learn that this Sacrament was in no wise instituted or introduced by men, but by Christ Himself. In the night in which He was betrayed He instituted it for His disciples, yea for all Christians, that it might be unto them His Testament, His parting gift, full of great comfort and blessing.

We Christians should therefore cherish this Testament as a treasure of the highest value, should love it dearly, and should make use of it cheerfully

and frequently, deriving from it much joy and consolation, thus fulfilling the will of our dying Lord and Saviour. His command in this regard is plain; He enjoins upon us the use of this Sacrament. True Christians will never disregard this command, but will readily and often find comfort in its fulfillment, even until that day when the Lord, who Himself gave us such a Testament, shall again come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead.

While the Pope yet held us in his sway we were frightened by the words of St. Paul: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself;" for no one taught us aright what these words really mean. Hence the Holy Sacrament was dishonored; the people shunned it as death-bringing, and instead of regarding it as food unto life, they thought it dangerous and pernicious. The lying priests brought this about, though we richly deserved it by our own base ingratitude. Christ meant it so well with us, but we were careless and ungrateful; no wonder therefore that our joy was changed into sorrow, our happiness into weeping, and our blessing into a curse. We ourselves were to blame in this; we shamefully neglected the great and sacred treasure.

A similar calamity is now threatened by the Sacramentarians, who bring dangerous controversies into the churches by their false doctrines concerning the Sacrament; for they teach the people that in it we have naught but bread and wine, thus depriving the Christians again of the comfortable assurance of grace, which Christ has connected with this Sacrament and given to His Church. We must therefore avoid these false teachers, else they will

drag us once more into the bitter woe which we endured under the Pope, when it had become customary to preach of this Sacrament in such a manner as to produce but fear and trembling, so that people refused to participate in it, and lost all the gladness and grace which this holy food can bring.

We were told that we must first confess all our sins, and do penance for them, ere we could approach the Table of the Lord. To do this was, however, an impossibility. We were conscious of our sinfulness and feared to partake of this food, judging ourselves unworthy of it, so that no one could commune with a cheerful heart. Every one mistrusted this benign institution, fearing it to be a source of death, or a means of "eating damnation to himself," as St. Paul expresses it. Surely that was a most lamentable state of affairs, when the people became averse to the most blessed Sacrament.

But the Pope made the evil worse by inconsiderately compelling the terrified and trembling souls to come to the Lord's Supper at least once a year. He excommunicated every one who did not annually come to the Sacrament; and yet he only distributed it under one form, as it is called, in direct contradiction to the command of our Lord, who so instituted His Testament that His body and blood should be received not only by eating of the bread, but also by partaking of the cup. This form of the institution of the Sacrament the Pope trampled under foot, and he even yet condemns as a heresy the distribution of the Lord's Supper under a two-fold form, even though Christ Himself thus instituted and ordered it. What a terrible abomination

they made of the Sacrament, causing people to be afraid of it, and then forcing them to receive it; and what was worse than all, changing the form of the institution, in plain opposition to the command of Christ.

Imagine for yourself what pleasure you would have in such a compulsory eating and drinking. You would have as little relish for it as the sick man has for the wine whose very smell he abhors, but which he is forced to swallow. It was a necessary consequence that the Holy Sacrament proved ineffectual with the people in the papacy; for they could but receive it with the conviction of their own impurity and unworthiness, and yet through fear of excommunication they partook of it. No wonder that it was to them void of consolation and happiness.

But the Pope still further abused the Holy Supper and the Testament of our Lord, when by the assistance of his priests he made it a matter of merchandize in behalf of the dead, so that the mass was celebrated without devotion, merely for money and revenue. Methinks this was, beyond all dispute, a most sacrilegious abuse of the Sacrament; and I have not the least doubt, if popery had remained in its glory, if the blessed Gospel had not been brought to light again, the living would finally have been entirely deprived of the Holy Supper, and it would have been applied only to the dead. Those of us more advanced in years can well recollect the pomp and ostentation with which mass for the departed was everywhere celebrated.

I mention these things in this connection to show how God punished an ungrateful world by permit-

ting the Pope to distribute the Sacrament in a mutilated manner to a benighted people, who went to the Lord's Table as if to perform a work, not to receive a blessing, fearing the wrath and judgment of God.

In addition to this the Pope employed the mass as a soothing remedy for every kind of misfortune and disease. Let such perversions be to us a warning example, that we may not become similar despisers of the Holy Sacrament, but that we may receive it right gladly, according to its institution and true meaning.

Tell me, is it not an exceedingly cheering word, when the Lord tells His disciples so graciously and kindly: "Take and eat, this is my body; take and drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, this do in remembrance of me," and do it not only once, but repeatedly until the end of time? Our blessed Lord desired, by means of this Sacrament and Testament, to keep alive in us our remembrance of Him and our faith. He therefore instituted His Supper as a constant memorial of His death, through which we are delivered from our sins and eternal misery.

In this we can see naught but condescension and love; there is no anger here nor vengeance; yea, parents could not deal more kindly with their children. Christ's chief desire, as He Himself declares, is that we shall not forget Him. It is His earnest intention that our whole being shall be impressed with the memory of His passion, that we may never forget how He died for us upon the cross and rose again from the dead. It was His purpose that coming generations should know Him

as their Lord, that they might be saved by Him; and therefore, also, He earnestly enjoined upon Christians to instruct the young in His word, and to keep His remembrance sacred, that those who come after them may also be induced to worship Him in the congregation of believers, and own Him as their Christ and only consolation. For this reason the Lord made His Testament, and we ought never to weary in the remembrance of it. Surely, when true friends meet it is no burdensome task for them to sit together in conversation throughout the night, forgetful of sleep and rest; why then should we grow weary of learning and of preaching the precious truth that Christ the Lord is our Redeemer?

But the Sacrament of the Holy Supper was instituted not merely that by its observance Christ might be honored; for He can truthfully say: I need not thy praise, I am the Son of God, whether thou glorifiest me or not; but also and especially for the reason that we stand in need of such a Testament and Supper, and that we might be benefited by it. Listen to the words with which He gives the bread: "Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you," and with which, soon after, He gives the cup: "Drink ye all of it; this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins."

This declaration is the Christian's most effective consolation; for he who really believes that Christ gave His body for him, and that He shed His blood for the remission of his sins, cannot despair, no matter what sin, the world and the devil may say. He knows that this treasure wherewith his sins

have been cancelled is far greater than all his iniquities.

But the consolation contained in this declaration stands not alone; Christ really gives us with the bread His body to eat, and with the wine His blood to drink, as the words plainly state, in spite of the devil. Each one that eateth and drinketh, receives for himself in this Sacrament the body and the blood of Christ as his own especial gift. Yea, this is the very truth which we must firmly hold: Christ suffered and died for me also, and not alone for St. Peter, St. Paul or other saints. To assure us of this truth Christ gave His Testament; for through it each one individually receives the body and the blood of Christ. It is therefore proper to say that through this Sacrament we obtain forgiveness of sins; for where Christ is, there is forgiveness of sins; here we have His body and blood, as the words declare; therefore he who eats and drinks, believing that the body of Christ was given for him, and that His blood was shed for the forgiveness of his sins, must surely have this forgiveness. Yet, it is not the act of going to the Sacrament, nor the eating and the drinking, whereby we gain this divine grace, as the Papists falsely teach concerning the performance of their mass; but it is the faith in us which believes the words of Christ when He says: I give you my body, given for you into death, and give you my blood, shed for you for the remission of your sins. Thus will our reception of the Sacrament tend to the strengthening of our faith, and the chief and greatest blessing of this Testament will be ours.

Another benign effect of this Sacrament is the

union, in faith and doctrine, which it produces among Christians, and which is so very necessary. To bring about true union among Christians it is not sufficient that they come together to hear the same preaching and the same word, but they must also meet around the same altar to receive the same food and drink.

One may, perchance, hear me preach the word and yet be my enemy; but if one partakes of the Lord's Supper he, by that act, makes for himself, individually, a public confession of his faith, although there may be hypocrites now and then; and thus a more reliable union, between the Christians who unite in this Sacrament, is formed than if they merely had the Gospel preached unto them, though this may also cause them to be of one mind. Those of the same faith and the same hope unite at the Table of the Lord, while those of a different faith stand aloof. Agreement in the Church is very desirable, and there should be no divisions in matters of faith. This union was properly called, by a Latin term, *Communio*, a communion, and those who would not agree with other Christians in faith, doctrine and life were called *Excommunicati*, as being different in their belief and conduct, and hence unworthy to belong to the congregation of those who are of one mind, lest they might produce dissensions and schisms. By means also of the Holy Sacrament Christ establishes this union among the little company of His believers.

Our old teachers entertained beautiful thoughts in regard to this when they said: Christ took bread and wine for His Supper to indicate that, just as many distinct and separate grains of wheat,

when ground together, make one loaf of bread, so we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread, though each one is a distinct person and separate individuality, 1 Cor. 10. And again, as many clusters of grapes and many little berries, each distinct and separate, when pressed together form one delicious juice, one wine, thus it is with the Christians who have the same faith, the same confession, the same love and hope of salvation.

This was the interpretation of our fathers, and they were not mistaken in it. The Holy Sacrament has the effect to firmly join the Christians together in unity of purpose, doctrine and faith, so that no one should stand alone, nor have his own doctrine or belief. The devil is sorely vexed at this, and is busy in endeavoring to destroy such unity and agreement. He knows full well what injury results to him, if we are united in our confession and adhere to one Head; hence he endeavors to tempt us, here and there, with false doctrines, with doubt, with lying insinuations in regard to the Sacrament and other articles of faith, hoping to cause dissensions in the Church.

It is true, offenses will come, yet it behooves us to guard against them, so that the devil may not entirely separate us. If one or the other insists on differing with us in the doctrine of the Sacrament, or in other parts of our faith, let us, who agree in one confession, be so much the more united in our faith in Christ Jesus; yea, let us be in this as one man. This, however, is only possible where there is unity in doctrine.

This, then, is an additional benefit of the institu-

tion of the Holy Supper. Our Lord gave us this Sacrament to bring about unity of faith, of doctrine and of life. The external differences in the stations of life will, of course, continue; there is no equality there. Each one has his own duties to perform, which differ vastly from each other. A farmer leads another life than a prince; the wife and mistress of the house has other duties to perform than the maid-servant. Such distinctions must ever remain in our every day life. But in Christ there is neither male nor female, no prince nor tiller of the soil: they are all Christians. The Gospel, the promise and faith which I have, belongs equally to prince, peasant, woman, servant and child.

Such equality is indicated by the Holy Supper, since in it we all receive the same food and nourishment, whether we be man or wife, matron or maid, father or child, ruler or subject. If we have the same faith we are heirs of the same heaven, though I may reside here and another in Jerusalem, and we are personally total strangers to each other; for we both have the same Lord, in whom we believe and hope for salvation. This union of faith causes the devil immense displeasure, and he is ever on the alert to sunder our communion; for he knows how his influence is thwarted when Christians firmly agree in faith and doctrine. Against these attempts of Satan, Christ instituted this Holy Sacrament as a means of uniting the believers.

From this it follows that this Sacrament is needed by every individual; and if we disregard it and fail to praise the Lord, and so sever ourselves from the communion of Christians, the loss will be ours, and will become greater the longer we abstain from the

Sacrament. It is true, indeed, that Christ has no need for Himself of our compliance with His ordinance, nor of our remembrance of Him; it is to our own advantage to do so; for if we are not in communion with Christ we are in communion with the devil, and will suffer great injury. Even if Satan cannot harm us externally, we still will carry with us in our bosoms our bitter foe.

We ever have near us an advocate of evil, whether we eat or drink, whether we are asleep or awake, even our own flesh, the old Adam. He accompanies us to bed and arises with us in the morning; he pleads unceasingly and eloquently, with the fixed purpose of estranging us from Christ and His Gospel. This advocate of evil whom we constantly carry about with us, and whose habitation is in our hearts, is ever intent on exciting us to become rich and great in the world, and sways us with the delusion that we have neither occasion nor time to go to the Sacrament. If we heed his lying counsels we will grow colder and colder in our love towards Christ and His gifts; yea, though we might even daily hear His word, this cunning tempter within us will bring it to pass that we do so merely outwardly, while in reality our devotion is a sham, and our thoughts are engaged with the business of this world. Show me the avaricious man who grows weary of his passion! Is it not rather true that the covetous man becomes fonder and fonder of his idols from day to day, cherishing and pursuing with eagerness avarice and usury? The same is true in regard to other sins. The lewd person delights in his unchastity; he thinks and speaks about it with evident glee, and indulges in his wicked

passion more and more. Such are the results of the instructions which the old Adam gives: they lead to destruction.

Christ desires to counteract the sinister influence of the old seducer within us, who would fix our attention alone and chiefly on temporal things. Christ instead would have us be mindful of eternity, of Himself, our Saviour, who died for us upon the cross. He would fain have us see our foolishness, so that we would gladly come unto Him, weary of our depraved life, exclaiming: O Lord, we know how sinful we are, and how unable to resist the allurements of evil, therefore we cry unto Thee for help; enable Thou us to shun the world and to love Thee truly. We stand in daily need of such remembrance of Christ in opposition to this pernicious advocate, this old Adam within us, who clamors about our ears day and night, hoping to plunge us, beyond all help, into the cares and pleasures of this world.

To counteract this wicked purpose, Christ instituted His Holy Supper, that its celebration should remind us of the life to come. He takes the bread and the cup, and tells His disciples to eat and to drink, saying, "This is my body and blood, given for you, and shed for your sins," at the same time exhorting us to remember Him, and not to run merely after the things of this world, as we generally do. In the Holy Supper He gives us an opportunity to receive Him, to come unto Him, and to remember Him; for in Communion the benefit is ours; He has no need of it.

I doubt not that the people would fairly crowd to the Sacrament if money, or earthly gifts, were dis-

tributed there; yea, the blind and the lame would rush thither, regardless of intervening rivers and mountains.

We ought, indeed, to be ashamed of ourselves, when we think what a miserable set we are, always ready to run after money and perishable things, while we are so slow, yea, so averse, to come to the Table of the Lord, where a heavenly gift, even His body and blood, awaits us. Here, in this Testament, a precious treasure, salvation and happiness, is to be conveyed to us; but, alas, we flee from it as from poison or some terrible punishment.

How comes it that we prize gold and silver more than this magnificent, precious treasure? The devil is the instigator of this our choice; he influences our old Adam, who is naturally backward and indifferent towards things eternal, and cares more for that which is temporal. This ingratitude and carelessness is very sinful, yea, much more than can be imagined; nevertheless we are often guilty of it, else we would seek more diligently the kingdom of heaven and its blessings, which are not transitory, like the earthly property, of which we are so much enamored. Let us never forget that we must in due time render an account of our behavior in this regard.

The Lord's Supper admonishes us not to be ungrateful any longer, but to realize, together with other Christians, with whom we confess our faith and share this most Holy Sacrament, what great blessings Christ bestows upon us through it, and how we should therefore serve and praise Him as our Lord, who not only died for us, but also gives us, as nourishment for our souls, His body and

blood. He desires that we should remember Him whilst we receive it to the strengthening of our faith and the preservation of unity among the Christians.

Whosoever refuses to comply with the command of the Lord, deserves to fall into the hands of false teachers, who preach to him that in the Lord's Supper there is naught but bread and wine. In the papacy the doctrine concerning this Sacrament was falsified, for the Lord was not remembered as He had ordered it; and hence it resulted that no one knew what the Lord's Supper was, and why one should receive it. Obedience to the Church was considered the chief concern of all, and the result was idolatry and invocation of the saints.

God grant that we may retain the true faith and have a living interest in this matter. We have the doctrine true and pure again, we understand why we go to the Holy Sacrament, to remember the Lord with praise and thanksgiving for His mercy and kindness, and also to receive therefrom consolation and strengthening of our faith. Let then our hearts be firm and not doubt; let us be assured that God is pleased with us, and will not punish us for our sins, since Christ gave for us His body and for us shed His sacred blood. Thus will we proclaim the death of our Lord aright and fulfill His command: "Do this in remembrance of me."

In view of this, judge for yourself what kind of Christians those persons are, who stay away from the Lord's Supper one whole year, yea two, three and even more years? Such people are surely possessed of the devil; they either have no knowledge of their sins, and consequently take no thoughts

how to be relieved of them, are else they are so wrapped up in the affairs of this world that they entirely forget the life to come. This is dreadful indeed. Whosoever professes to be a Christian and desires to live in accordance with his profession, must come repeatedly and often to the Holy Sacrament. Its blessings are very necessary for the Christian, as we have shown above.

This, however, does not apply to those who cannot receive the entire Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ, and hence refrain from participating in it at all. Such people must be satisfied with the word of Christ and the assurances of His Gospel, until God in mercy gives them an opportunity to enjoy again the Holy Supper in its entirety and purity, as Christ instituted it.

May God give us grace, through His Holy Spirit, that we may ever receive this blessed Sacrament to the glory of Christ, and to our souls' salvation. Amen.

SECOND SERMON FOR THE DAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. 11, 27-34. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

This text is of great importance and deserves to be attentively considered by Christians. We have already learned, from the previous sermon, how the people misunderstood these words, so as to deprive themselves of the comfort contained in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, yea, even shunned it as something dangerous.

It is true, Judas did not receive this Sacrament to his consolation or amendment. There were also many among the Corinthians, as St. Paul tells us, who received it unworthily, and thus brought upon themselves bodily and spiritual punishment. There is indeed a difference in the reception of this Sacrament; some partake of it worthily and unto eternal life, but others unworthily unto condemnation, inasmuch as they do not repent and have true faith. Hence it is of the first importance that we learn to know what is meant by the expression "eating and drinking worthily or unworthily."

The Papists taught that one should not partake of this Sacrament except he be entirely fit and perfectly pure. Such fitness, however, they made dependent upon certain works of penance, much eulogized by the priests; such as auricular confession, castigation of the body, fastings, prayers, giving of alms, and the like. These were accounted sufficient satisfaction for the sins committed. But such worthiness is of no account; for it is impossible by our own deeds to become really pure and worthy before God. Even the disciples were not perfectly pure when Christ gave them His Supper, for He tells them that they have need of washing their feet, by which He meant not the washing with water, but the forgiveness of their sins.

Let us then learn to understand and to remember, in this connection, that they do not receive the Sacrament unworthily who know and mourn their wretchedness; who confess that they are poor, miserable sinners; who experience many a temptation; who are yet affected by anger and impatience, by passion and intemperance. Such and similar sins adhere to us more or less as long as we live on earth: and if we earnestly repent of them, and do not continue in them against the warning voice of our conscience; if we seek their forgiveness and consolation in the misery which they brought upon us, we ought not to be deterred from coming to the Holy Sacrament. As long as the old Adam is within us, it will surely happen that impatience, wicked thoughts, and the like, will trouble us and cause us to sin. If we then had to remain away from the table of the Lord until we had become entirely free

from sin, we would, indeed, never be fit to come to this Holy Sacrament.

They, however, receive it unworthily who knowingly and intentionally persist in their sins, such as revengeful wrath, murder, fornication, adultery, and similar manifest sins and crimes. Christ instituted the Holy Sacrament unto the forgiveness of our sins, that we should forsake them and not continue in them. Judas received the Sacrament unto his condemnation and death, because he had determined to destroy the Lord, and did not recede from this his wicked purpose.

Some people are shocked by this example; they know that they are guilty of hatred, malice, and other sins, wherefore they will not come to the Lord's Supper, but postpone it from day to day, and from year to year, simply because they are unwilling to give up their anger and their hatred. Such persons commit a twofold wrong; they cling tenaciously to their sins, and also wickedly despise the command of Christ to partake of His Sacrament. These people should desire to put an end to their wrath and envy, should strive to desist from sin, and should long to obtain, through the reception of the Holy Sacrament, remission of sins and strengthening of their faith. If then there is yet remaining a glimmering of sin and weakness, if now and then evil thoughts and passions make their presence known, we must cry unto God and pray: O Lord, give me a peaceable, kind and loving heart, and cleanse me from my sins, for Christ's sake. Thus can we come to the Supper of the Lord in faith and hope, without being terrified by this saying of St. Paul; for this does not pertain to those who long

to be liberated from the bondage of sin, but to those who are therein, and do not desire to be freed, but rather find pleasure in their wickedness and defend their evil deeds. The Corinthians were such people; wherefore the apostle tells them: "I praise you not," indicating that they were not penitent, and yet desired to be praised as good Christians.

The custom prevailing at that time in regard to the Lord's Supper was different from the present. The Christians came together in the evening, and each one ate whatever he had, in the presence of the others. Sometimes it happened that a part ate and drank too much, while others who had nothing suffered want. Such conduct the apostle condemns. He declares it to be damnable, if persons deliberately sin, and then go to the Sacrament as though nothing had happened. They who act thus, eat and drink the Sacrament unworthily, and God punishes them with sickness and other afflictions.

You observe that such wickedness is far greater than the shortcomings of wavering hearts which, seeing the error of their ways, return to the path of duty and earnestly pray: O God, we have done evil before Thee; forgive us our manifold sins. Christ will surely pardon them, and invite them to His Supper; He does not invite the self-righteous and saintly, but just these poor sinners, who on account of their guilt are greatly troubled and in sorrow. This He means by the words: "This is my body given for you unto death, this is my blood which is shed for the remission of your sins." Surely, they must have been great and guilty sinners for whom such a glorious sacrifice and such a great ransom was offered. The great requirement,

therefore, is this: we must discover that we are really sinners, and then come to the Table of the Lord for comfort and relief; but he who will not confess his sins nor amend his ways, should by no means come to this Holy Sacrament.

It is often the case, and strangely so, that those who need not fear, unto whom God is truly merciful and whom He would own as His children, are sorely troubled with fear, whilst those who ought to tremble with terror are entirely unconcerned and think not of their sins, but continue straight on upon their wicked course, as would a rifle ball when once discharged. We see this in the example of the Papists. They scorn and persecute the word of God, put to death the faithful Christians, and force people, in violation of their conscience, to commit idolatry; still they think themselves pious and holy, and are right merry in their delusion. On the other hand, the little company who do not sin intentionally are diffident and affrighted; they lament the sins of which they were once guilty, and wish that they had never occurred. Thus it is, those who might have consolation do not lay hold upon it, whilst they who ought to fear are secure and devoid of every terror.

In reference to this fact the apostle Paul says: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." To examine one's self means to consider well in what condition we are. If we find that our hearts are hardened, that we are not willing to refrain from sin, and that we do not fear its presence, then we may well conclude that we should not go to the Sacrament; for we are then no Christians. The best thing we

could do, under such circumstances, would be to put a stop to such wickedness, to repent, to trust faithfully in the promises and mercy of God, and to unite again with Christians in the participation of the Holy Sacrament. If, however, we are unwilling to do this, we ought not to approach the Lord's Table; for we would surely eat and drink damnation there. Let us carefully meditate upon what eternity has in store for us, if we thus fall under the judgment of God. If we are mindful of this, we will not be slow to repent, to put aside anger and other kinds of wickedness, and to make our peace with God in His Holy Supper. Again, if our hearts are contrite, if we confess our sins before God and are heartily sorry on account of them, if we believe that God in mercy, for Christ's sake, will pardon us, then we are well prepared and can confidently say unto the Saviour: O Lord, we are poor sinners, and therefore come to Thy Table to receive consolation. If we approach the Sacrament in such a spirit, we shall be truly ready and receive the richest blessings. In behalf of such contrite and sorrowing souls the Lord's Table was prepared, so that they might find there consolation and joy. Those, however, who are without penitence, and who continue in their haughtiness and sin, will not be relieved of their fear and will surely be damned.

Some of the old teachers in the Church understood this word of the apostle: "Let a man examine himself," as excluding from the Sacrament all persons who are guilty of manifest crimes punished by the civil government, such as murder, adultery, lewdness, and the like. This is a mistake; for, as we have seen above, only those who willfully con-

tinue in their sins, and will not amend their lives, are cautioned to refrain from partaking of the Sacrament. These would only augment their account of wrath; for by coming to the Table of the Lord they make a pretended profession of Christian faith, of which not the least symptoms are discernible in their lives.

Whosoever has been guilty of these great sins, and has repented of them, ought not to be deterred by them from seeking absolution and receiving the Lord's Supper. Let him come and pray unto God to give him strength to avoid such wickedness in the future, and to lead a better life. Likewise our infirmities, which daily vex us, ought not to keep us away; for of these we shall never get rid entirely while we live in this world. If it were then our determination not to come to the Sacrament until we were perfectly righteous and pure, we would be compelled to stay away from it forever.

I can speak from my own experience in regard to this, and I know the effects of the avoidance of the Lord's Supper. I was under the influence of this devilish delusion, and became more and more a stranger at the Lord's Table. Avoid this error, my hearers, and see to it that you come often and well prepared; if sin and crime rest heavily upon your souls, forget not then your Lord and Saviour; think of His death and sacrifice for sinners; repent and trust in Him. This, and no more, He requires of us as worthy guests at His Table.

Our great infirmity and daily transgressions, for which we need support and forgiveness, as well as the unity of faith and confession thereby established in the Church, make it an imperative necessity that

we should frequently celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper, thus fulfilling His command: "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore, whosoever comes to the Table of the Lord as a poor sinner, is yet worthy and well prepared; nor will he eat and drink damnation to himself; but he will receive the body and the blood of Christ worthily, unto his soul's salvation.

May God grant us this blessing through His Holy Ghost, for the sake of Christ Jesus, His Son, our Redeemer. Amen.

THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER.

JESUS WASHES THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES.

JOHN 13, 1-17. Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto Him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean. So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

John is the only Evangelist who mentions the incident of the washing of the feet of the disciples by Christ; hence it might seem that this occurrence was of but little importance. John, however, introduces it with so much minuteness and care, that we cannot but believe that Christ intended to teach an important lesson by it; for after its per-

formance He admonishes His disciples to observe this example and to wash each others' feet. Hence many Christians still continue this practice. The Papists, however, in this, as in other matters, do not understand the true meaning; they are satisfied with the mere external observance of the custom, and have therefore no benefit from it. Hence it is necessary to preach about this occurrence, and to instruct the people as to its true meaning.

The first part of the narrative, as John gives it, appears somewhat peculiar. He begins thus: "When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Now, what has all this to do with the washing of feet? How can these words be made to harmonize with the rest of the story? These questions can easily and fully be answered, if we but earnestly consider the whole account. When the Evangelist tells us that Jesus knew that His hour was now at hand to depart from this world unto the Father, he wishes thereby to awaken within us a lively attention to this deed and the lessons which it contains; for this washing of feet happened nearly in the last hour before Christ's departure from this world. Now it is certain that we remember and cherish the last wishes of our dying friends more earnestly and dutifully than any other of their words and deeds; for when it comes to dying, pleasantries and jestings are at an end, and the words then spoken are full of sincerity and earnestness.

St. John would therefore tell us: Listen, you shall hear a story and a lesson important, and well

to be remembered; you shall hear of the last deed of Christ and of His final admonition to His disciples, which He began at the washing of their feet and concluded upon His way to the Mount of Olives. These circumstances impress us with the great importance of the incident recorded in our text; for, surely, if it were of a trifling kind, it would not have occurred in this solemn hour of anxiety and peril.

Again, we must bear in mind that John refers to the "love" which the Lord manifested towards His disciples, in order that we may learn, from this washing of feet, the great condescension of Christ to men, yea, even unto us. Hence we assert the great importance of this incident for the following reasons: It occurred just before His death, and in it He exhibited His great love and condescension. We, therefore, must not slight this deed and its admonition: for when love and mercy prompts the Lord to action, His deeds can not be insignificant.

St. John further exalts this subject when he says: Jesus loved His own which were in the world, that is, the time has now come for the Lord to depart from His disciples, who, while yet in the world, have need of such an example and admonition, lest they be tempted and yield to the allurements of the world. The children of this world are selfish; each one thinks only of himself and his own welfare, no matter how the others may fare. Christ would teach us, by His own example, how we should act towards each other, and avoid this mean selfishness, which is so prevalent. He is the Lord over all, yet He humbles Himself and even becomes a servant to His disciples. Let us learn humility from Him,

that we may not fall into the sin of selfishness, but know how to avoid it and be happy.

The Evangelist intentionally records the fact that the devil prompted Judas to betray the Lord, and wishes thereby to teach us, that the Apostles and all Christians are subject not only to the allurements of the world, but are also directly influenced by the devil to selfishness, arrogance and pride. The only available remedy against this evil is to follow the example of Christ, who, just at the eve of His betrayal into the hands of the heathens, gave us yet such an illustrious proof of humility and condescension as is recorded in the incident of the washing of the feet of His disciples.

"To be in the world" means really to be in the midst of devils. It is therefore impossible for us to conduct ourselves aright unless we follow the precepts of the word of God and also this example of Christ. The flesh is averse to all self-denial, and would ever prefer its own supremacy. To counteract such inclination, the Lord gives us here an example to be remembered and followed. He is filled with true love toward us, and desires to protect us from sin and shame.

The introductory words of the Evangelist to the narrative of the washing of feet are therefore very valuable; they teach us the love and care of Christ toward His people. And yet this account, though read and chanted a thousand times and more, in many a convent and cathedral, is not appreciated nor understood.

But let us proceed. What is the meaning of the words: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come

from God, and went to God?" These are important words, indicating the thoughts of our Lord previous to the washing of feet. He evidently did not then meditate upon His approaching passion, nor did He at that time feel sad, as was the case soon after; but He thought of His glory which He had with the Father from all eternity, and which He would now again assume as to His human nature. Such thoughts were sublime, and might well have absorbed His entire attention, to the utter exclusion of the world and every mortal therein.

But even now, while meditating upon His divine glory, He arises suddenly from the table, throws off His outer garment, takes a towel, girds Himself, pours water into a basin, washes the feet of His disciples, and wipes them with the towel wherewith He was girded.

Consider well His thoughts and His deed. He knows and thinks of it that He is Lord God over all; that in less than one day the devil shall have accomplished what he can, and that thereafter all His enemies shall be vanquished and His Christians be at ease. Now turn to His deed, and what is it? Why, this very Lord performs now a task which is commonly done by the servants of the house; He washes the feet of His disciples.

Christ desires us to learn from this occurrence to humiliate ourselves, and not to abuse our position and our power by insolence and arrogance toward our fellow-men, but to help and to serve them with our means as much as we can, even as He Himself, the Lord of glory, became humble and of low estate, yea, even the servant of His disciples. Jesus Himself explains the meaning of the feet-washing when He

says: "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Here we see what this feet-washing really means, and that this story is told us that we might imitate its precepts with care and diligence.

The Pope, his monks and priests, also kings and princes, now and then, observe the custom of washing the feet of certain paupers; but of humility in the performance of this ceremony there is no sign discernible. There are many among them, and that too the more honest ones, who wash the feet of their brothers of the order, or of their subjects, with so little of the spirit of humility, that they afterwards, in the confessional, seek forgiveness for the pride which dwelt in their hearts during the execution of this duty. Why, dear friend, tell me what kind of humility is it if you by this act seek applause and the appearance of saintliness; or what availeth it your brother if you wash his feet to make a display, and to gain glory before the world?

If our bishops would really take to heart the great calamity of idolatry that afflicts the people who have not the true doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, nor know how to obtain eternal life; if they would endeavor to have the true word of God preached and the sacraments administered in their

purity, to the exclusion of idolatrous ceremonies, such as the mass, calling upon the saints, sacrifices for the dead, and the like, instructing the people, on the other hand, what the true service of God is, how they should fear Him and love His word, and take consolation from the sacrifice of Christ the Saviour,—then indeed would they act in the spirit of Jesus, when He washed the feet of His disciples. But alas, such a spirit is not to be found in our bishops and rulers; they rather meditate upon an increase of idolatry and false doctrines, and how they can soil the feet of their people still more. Surely, such conduct is against the command of our Lord. May God in mercy remedy the evil and stop the devil's work, who has made the people blind, and rules them as a tyrant does his slaves.

The Papists call this ceremony of feet-washing by a Latin term which means a mandate, a command. But Christ does not mean the outward act when He says: "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet;" for He immediately explains this in the words: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord." These words are plain enough. If we are honored on account of our position in life, we ought to remain humble and serve our inferiors with such gifts as they do not possess. In full accordance with this, the Lord afterwards gives His mandate concerning love when He says: "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another." Now the true nature of love is humility and charity, kindness and compassion. When Christ commands the washing of feet, He requires the presence of

such a love. It is evident that our Lord, by His action in the Gospel, did not intend to teach us the outward washing of feet, which is done by means of water; for then it would be obligatory to wash the feet of all; or rather, which would certainly be more serviceable, to prepare a regular bath for the people, in which they could wash their whole body. This of course cannot be the meaning of Christ's command in this regard. He simply gave us by His example an important lesson, that we should be humble, and properly employ the gifts and graces which we have, to the advantage of our brethren, and that we should despise no one, but rather excuse the shortcomings of our fellow-men, and help them to become better.

In this sense, washing of feet must be practiced not merely upon this day, but every day of our life, and we must not grow weary in well-doing towards our fellow-men. For such a purpose, and for such feet-washing, Christ set us the example which we are now considering. Let us remember this.

Those whom God has endowed with much wisdom and honor, and who are called to the office of the ministry, should be especially intent on practicing zealously this feet-washing, that they may not become guilty of abusing the gifts and authority which they have, but employ them faithfully to the service and welfare of the Church. For if our Lord and Saviour, who well knew that the time of exaltation into His eternal kingdom of majesty and grace was approaching, yet humbled Himself so low that in obedience to His Father's will He gave Himself for us into death, even the death of the cross, how much rather do we poor creatures need

such humiliation, we who are tempted by the devil day and night, and who are in constant danger of falling into the meshes of pride, avarice and self-esteem! The devil knows full well that he has gained the field, and is not injured by all our preaching, if we as servants of the Church forget the command of Christ to be humble, and if we seek after temporal honor and authority.

The Pope's example verifies this assertion. As soon as he turned his attention to the obtainment of worldly glory and power, and began to neglect his spiritual charge, so soon did the Church decay. Secular matters claimed the attention of the Pope, to the exclusion of the true welfare of the Church. The devil succeeded in setting aside the word of God and the true worship, substituting therefor falsehoods and idolatries, which were very lucrative and conducive to the aggrandizement of the priesthood.

I believe that Christ, when he exhibited such humility in washing the feet of His disciples, had in mind the great corruption which, on account of the selfishness and pride of the clergy, would creep into His Church in later years. This great evil began to manifest itself soon after; the bishops wrangled with each other about their relative superiority, and were so at variance with each other that finally Antichrist established himself at Rome, and arrogated such supremacy to himself that he not only ruled the Church, but also kings and emperors, and made himself successor of St. Peter and vicar of Christ on earth. This I call a fine way of being humble and of washing feet, after the ex-

ample which our Lord has given us. Yes, great humility, forsooth!

It was so even then. Judas was not affected by the ceremony of feet-washing, nor by the solemn words of Christ; he meditated all the while how he could betray his Master and get the thirty pieces of silver. The Lord knew this, and was sad on account of such depravity, as the Evangelist tells us. He well knew that Judas was not the only miscreant in this respect, but that he would have a great multitude of followers, who would all be ready to betray and deny their Lord, if they could thereby but obtain the coveted pieces of silver. The knowledge of this fact causes sorrow and pain to the Saviour. He is filled with love and compassion towards all, and is ready to sacrifice His own life for their eternal happiness, and yet Judas and his horde of disciples care naught for this. They confess that Christ was meek and lowly, that especially by the act of feet-washing He showed His humility and love, but still they will not do as He did; they are proud on account of their station and title in the Church; because they are called Pope, cardinals and bishops they make themselves lords and arrogate to themselves homage from their fellow-men. They would rather betray and deny Christ a hundred times than to renounce a particle of their authority and glory; it matters little to them if God's word is trampled under foot and souls perish, so they only get wealth and glory among men. The Pope with his fellows is ever busy to crush the pure doctrine and to confirm the former idolatry, which was so greatly conducive to his self-aggrandizement and superiority.

We ought not to be such disciples of Judas, but should ever remember that we are not preachers or officers of the Church to show our dignity and to be great lords, but to do our duty faithfully and humbly for the welfare of the Church. Thus will we benefit our fellow-men with the gifts which we have, and will be engaged in the proper feet-washing; we will also, in this way, fulfill the command of Christ to His pleasure and honor, and will be enabled to resist more successfully the wiles and snares of the evil one.

The devil makes it his especial aim to render preachers and those engaged in the service of the Church proud and selfish; and if he is successful in this attempt, he has won the contest. They will then be so engaged in temporal matters that Christ, His word, His Church, and their pastoral office, will become of secondary importance to them, or will, perhaps, be entirely forgotten. Examples of such men are plenty, even now.

Let no one think himself exempt from such temptation, but rather practice more zealously than before the virtue of feet-washing. Even St. Paul says: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." If it was so with the Apostle, how much more are we poor Christians, to whom God has given such high offices, in danger of self-exaltation! Let us take care, therefore, and employ well the various talents which God has granted us; let us exercise pure humility, imitating Christ who, with towel in hand, arises from the table to wash the feet of others, who thinks not first

of Himself, but how He may be of service to His brethren.

We are therefore justified in applying this incident of our text chiefly to those who occupy positions of an official kind in the Church, instructing them how sedulously to perform their duties, and how important it is for them to remain in a state of humility. God called them into their various offices, not on their own account, but to benefit their fellow-Christians. It is their duty faithfully to serve their brethren, and not to complain if their task is perilous and hard.

But all Christians, no matter what their position in life is, should have this spirit of humility. Kings and emperors, though their office is of a secular kind, if they are true Christians, must wash the feet of their people. God did not give them such a high position to live in luxury, lasciviousness and lawlessness, but to make use of their talents for the benefit of their subjects. They should see to it, first of all, that the word of God is preached in their land by faithful ministers, and that idolatry and disturbances of the true worship of God are not allowed. They are accountable to God for the performance of this duty, and cannot expect the divine blessing to rest upon them or their children, unless they are faithful to their trust. How could God be a friend and ally of those who care nothing for His word, or who force their people into public idolatry and into false devotions?

Again, this feet-washing inculcates earnestness, trustworthiness and zeal in the administration of temporal governments. Rulers must not revel day and night, indulge in the chase and in sports, and

inconsiderately oppress the people; it is, on the contrary, their duty to promote peace and happiness throughout the land, to defend the inhabitants against domestic and foreign enemies, and to enforce equal rights to all. If kings and rulers would only practice this kind of feet-washing, it would keep them busy, not alone on this festive Thursday, but through the entire year; yea, it should keep them awake many a night, when others rest, who have not so great a responsibility upon themselves. They must attend to the affairs of Church and State, and thus have their hands more than full, if they wish to do their part assiduously and well.

But what we said above in regard to Judas and the Pope is also true in this connection. The real feet-washing is generally neglected, that is, the rulers disregard the true welfare of their people, and think they can satisfy them with feasts and public demonstrations, which however avail nothing. It is no great thing to wash one's own feet or those of a friend; but to enforce justice, to defend the truth in doctrine and public worship, is not every one's business, nor is every one capable of doing it, but only they whom God has called to such important offices.

In the lower vocations of life the same practice ought to prevail. The master and the mistress of a family wash the feet of their children and servants, if they treat them kindly and attentively, and if they bring them up in the fear of God and ready to do His will. Husband and wife wash each other's feet if they exercise a forbearing spirit towards each other, avoiding anger and inconsiderate scolding. Servants wash the feet of their employers if they

are pious, honest, diligent and obedient, and if they receive even reprimands in a spirit of meekness, knowing that in the end they are benefited thereby.

In short, if you enjoy a peculiar blessing and gift, which your fellow-man has not, employ these to his benefit, no matter who you are or what your position in life may be. Be not arrogant, and despise not him who is less gifted than you are. This is the proper feet-washing which God commanded us to observe.

It is true, and you will find that it is, such feet-washing is not as easy as that sham observance of the custom, in which an abbot or a prior washes the feet of his monks, or in which a bishop performs this task for his chapter. There is no real humility in these cases; for they who wash the others seek their own honor thereby, and expect still greater homage from the recipients of their condescension. You must perform this task in a different sense and manner, by humbling yourself in such a way as to be ever ready to assist others who have not the gifts which you have. This will demand a precious victory over the old Adam within us, who seeks his own honor and exaltation, and is always more prepared to exercise vengeance and oppression than to do good toward others.

Again, we must understand by the term "feet-washing" a disposition which not only willingly serves others in a humble spirit, but which is also ready to forgive the failings of the brethren, as St. Paul says: "Bear ye one another's burdens." For it is simply a fact that in the wide world we will never find a Christian so blameless and perfect as to be entirely free from every fault and blemish.

The one gives way to anger, the other is despondent and morose, the third too boisterous and frivolous, the fourth too niggardly and close, the fifth too free and easy. In one word, as even the heathens remarked: Each one has his load which others must help to bear.

We are often inclined to think: If only our neighbor had not this or that failing, we would gladly associate with him; but his many faults seem to us insufferable and repulsive. Let us bear in mind, whenever we observe such shortcomings in our husband, wife, child, servants, neighbors and others, that we have an excellent occasion for feet-washing. Let us do it then; that is, let us bear with mildness such infirmities, and seek to relieve others of them, always aware that this world is really a filthy cess-pool, which we cannot pass without soiling our feet. This happens to me and to you, and to every one. Should we therefore run away into deserts and solitudes, and associate with no one, as formerly the monks did? No, it is a Christian duty to wash the feet of others, we must stay where they are. We must be among the people who wade through unclean, filthy places. We must unbend our proud reserve, and though our feet should be clean and pretty, it behooves us to carry water, rags, soap and brush to cleanse and wash the feet of those who need such ablution.

To do this we must obey the word of the Apostle and "bear one another's burdens"; we must right willingly assist the weak and needy, exercise patience and compassion, give them our hand for a support, and instruct and guide them to a purer and

better life. If we are prudent, wise and learned, we ought therefore not to despise the simple and silly, but should so much the more exercise our skill to help them and to improve their condition. If we are pious, chaste and temperate let us not judge others harshly who have not such virtues, but let us strive to turn them from their evil way and lead them to do what is right. If we have not the faults which we notice in our brother, let us thank God that it is so; but at the same time we must not forget that we may have other failings which need patience and assistance from others. On the other hand, our neighbors have gifts with which they can help us in our infirmities; and even if they should be unable to help us even in the least, they are still our neighbors, whom we should treat with Christian love, as God has commanded us. If we act thus, we may succeed in gaining him who otherwise is stubborn and perverse, unless he be like this Judas, so entirely possessed of the devil, that he will not heed our advances. Let harmony and friendship prevail among us as much as possible, and to this end let us exercise the spirit of humility.

What a pleasant, quiet, Christian life we could lead, if we would only be ready ever to wash each other's feet! The one would assist and defend the other; we would all exercise patience and mildness and have no other aim but to make each other happy. Then might we be comforted by the assurance that we had, to some extent at least, complied with the command of Christ, and might appropriate the word of our Lord: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." But if we are derelict in the performance of our duty in this regard, we will feel

a piercing sting in our hearts and be unhappy people, devoid of grace and joy.

As we have said, this feet-washing is a bitter task for our old Adam. He desires the services of others, but will make no similar returns. He is also much offended if he finds no thanks for his favors. But we must continue the feet-washing, the well-doing toward others, though they prove ungrateful. To do this we need not only perseverance, but chiefly patience and humility, divine gifts which we must seek in earnest prayer.

From this we learn what this feet-washing means ; it teaches an humble, friendly and Christ-like spirit, which Christians should, under all circumstances, manifest in their intercourse with each other. The Lord desires to direct our thoughts to the necessity of humility and condescension ; therefore He performed this ceremony of feet-washing shortly before H's death. No matter what our ability may be, we dare not boast on account of our great endowments, but must reason thus : By giving us greater gifts than others, God meant that we should employ them in the service of others, and that we should cultivate so much the more a spirit of lowliness, and thrust the devil aside with his promptings to pride and arrogance. If we yield to him and become filled with self-esteem, we are lost ; we are then no longer disciples of Jesus, but of Judas, as is the Pope and his crowd.

The Lord, however, wishes to teach us, just here, another and more important lesson in regard to His person. When Peter refuses to be washed, Jesus answers him : "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." In these words Christ refers not to

the external washing of the feet, but to the washing from sin by His blood shed upon the cross, which washing still is efficacious among the believers in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Such washing is no example; for we can cleanse neither ourselves nor others from sin. The Son of God, the Lamb of God, who bore the sins of the world, can do it, and He alone. They who are washed of Christ confess that God in mercy, through His Son, pardoned and forgave their sins, and therefore they are ready to forgive the wrong which others may have done unto them, as Christ teaches Matt. 18, and as we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

It is therefore evident that we should practice this feet-washing during our whole life. Christ set us the example shortly before His death, and He did it through love of us, for He knew how we must dwell in an unclean world. May God grant us His Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus His Son, that we may ever bear in mind this admonition, and may fashion our life accordingly. Amen.

SERMONS ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATIONS.

In this season of the year it is customary for the Church, both in her hymns and sermons, to dwell especially upon the passion of Christ. We also will follow this custom. Indeed, we consider it very appropriate that the narrative of the sufferings of our Lord should, at a certain fixed period of the year, be read in the churches to the people, word for word, from beginning to end, and that it be fully explained to them, so that they may understand its use, and derive from it much consolation. It is sadly evident with what effect the devil resists the Gospel, though it be preached daily, and how the hearts grow cold towards it, so that they do not amend, but rather grow worse from year to year. This distressing fact ought surely to prompt us to continue in the preaching of the Word, and especially of that part of it which tells of the suffering and death of Christ. We must endeavor to have the people know and appreciate this part of the Gospel; nor dare we be derelict in the performance of this duty. If we would neglect to preach on this subject one, two or three years, the people would surely forget it. Even we, who continually busy ourselves with the Word, experience a decrease of interest in it if we neglect the perusal of it for a day or two; how great then would be the injury to the people at large, if they should miss the preaching of

these truths for a year or two? They would become as wild as beasts; therefore it is so urgent that we preach and teach the Word in season and out of season. The devil is ever active in resisting the efficacy of the Word, else there would be many believers, and people would be converted; for surely it is now preached often and clearly.

For the Papists this week is one of torture; they sing and read and preach exceedingly much concerning the passion of Christ. But what does it avail them? It is true, they speak of Christ's sufferings; but in their heart there is no thought of them, or else they would not prize so highly their own self-inflicted penances and their own works. But it is not much better with us, who have the pure Gospel abundantly preached to us; our lives and deeds indicate that we also have disregarded it. The effects of the preaching of the Word are therefore not the same with all, inasmuch as not all are disposed to receive it. If we were to relate to the people some idle tales and stories, they would remember them at once; whereas now, thousands upon thousands hear repeatedly the preaching of the Gospel without retaining it, and without profiting by its instructions. They come back from church just as they went there. They hear the Word, but disregard it as something common and unimportant.

There are some, on the other hand, who hear it gladly when they are told Christ rendered satisfaction for us, and that by our own merits and works we cannot obtain salvation, but that Christ alone has purchased it for us by His sufferings and death; but as soon as they are told that to enjoy the bene-

fits of this atonement they must avoid avarice, worldly-mindedness, gluttony, self-esteem, &c., they are displeased and become enraged. They are unwilling to be rebuked on account of their sins, or to be regarded as Gentiles. Here, also, it is the devil who labors to make the Word of no effect, and we cannot expect any thing else but such aversion to the application of the truth. It behooves us so much the more, to continue steadfast in the Word, to the glory of God and to our own souls' salvation, that some may learn to love it, although many are indifferent, and that thus the sacrifice of the Son of God in our behalf may be known and remembered.

The preaching of this truth began in Paradise, when it was said to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman should crush the head of the serpent. The Church has retained the proclamation of this Gospel, and will retain it until the end of time. Nor can we perform any better service than to proclaim everywhere, in the church, from the pulpit and at home, this fact of the sacrifice of God for the redemption of all mankind.

As Israel was heavily burdened with the ceremonial law, and was compelled to sacrifice calves, heifers, &c., thus the papacy still conducts its divine worship. If we had to observe all those ceremonies and defray all the expenses incident to them, I fear there would be many complaints of insufferable burdens. But not much is required of us: only this pleasing service, that we should remember His boundless mercy, manifested in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, and that we should preach this and teach it to our children. Let us thank God if

we can enjoy such divine service, which surely will not be useless, but will rather bring forth glorious fruits and many blessings unto men.

The Turks have lost this kind of worship; they have forgotten Christ and substituted Mahomet in His place. The Jews have also rejected Him. Nor is it much better in Germany, where people have become weary of this worship and neglect it. But we may depend upon it that as soon as this true worship is lost, so soon will punishment follow. If we refuse to worship God, when we need only to hear a sermon which tells us of the suffering and death of Christ for us, we need look for nothing else but that, as a well merited penalty, another more severe, and withal an ineffective kind of worship will be imposed upon us. Therefore we ought to preach and hear, right willingly, of the passion of our Lord, so that we may never forget its blessings, even though Satan, the old enemy of truth, may busily attempt to resist and crush the Word.

But again, our own wants require that this be done. As long as we live in this world our flesh and blood will burden us, even as would the weight of a millstone. On every side we are subjected to temptations which take possession of our thoughts and time, so that we forget Christ and His sufferings; earthly possessions, worldly honor, food, drink, carnal indulgences, misfortunes, sickness and adversity are all, more or less, apt to have such an effect upon us. Hence it is necessary to set apart an especial season for the service of God. The devil is ever on the alert to insinuate all kinds of wickedness into our hearts, and would fain make

them as cold as ice. Where God's Word is not repeatedly proclaimed in sermons, in hymns, in private conversation, so that we may not forget it or become callous towards it, there it is impossible for our hearts, which are burdened with many an earthly pain and sorrow, with wicked purposes and the devil's malicious instigations, not to fail and to fall from Christ. Thus it is an urgent necessity that the preaching of the Gospel continue among us, that we may hear and retain it, otherwise we would soon forget our Lord.

Nor should we overlook the wants of our young people, who need instruction so much; and many mechanics, laborers, and servants, who are Christians by baptism, cannot even read. Much zeal and energy is needed, that these people may be taught that which they know not, but which is so important to their welfare. God cannot be satisfied with us, if we disregard the precious treasure which He has given us; if we, perhaps, hear the preaching of the Word and gape at it without learning anything. Nor will the devil desist from his attempts to cause us to do what is evil. If we will not hear, nor learn, nor remember the word of truth, we will be condemned to listen to and heed the falsehoods of the devil, unto our souls' eternal damnation. The Papists, the Turks, the Jews, and Anabaptists are examples of this. Let us, therefore, never grow weary of the proper worship of God; let us readily hear and heed the sermons preached on the passion of Christ.

THE BENEFITS ACCRUING FROM THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

Of these St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, 5 chap., thus writes: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

To preach the passion of Christ our Lord properly, it is not sufficient to read the narrative to the people, but we must add admonition and instruction, that they may realize and remember why Christ suffered thus, and in what way they are benefited by His passion. The method pursued by the Papists, especially by the monks, in presenting this truth, and which was only calculated to arouse the emotions of the people and to fill them with pity and lamentation, must be rejected as utterly useless. He who could stir up the emotions of people best was considered the most effective passion-preacher. Hence we find in those sermons principally railing against the Jews, descriptions of the lamentation of the Virgin Mary when she saw the death of her Son, and the like. All this, however, is nothing but hypocrisy, as really all worship in the papacy is; the true spirit of devotion is wanting, and there are no fruits of amendment there. If we attentively consider the preaching of the apostles and prophets, we shall find a totally different method of preaching on the

passion of our Lord. They did not waste words on the simple story of the event, but presented it unadorned, pointedly and briefly. But of the meaning of this passion, and how it is effective for us if properly applied,—of this they spake repeatedly and much.

It was indeed a short sermon, if merely the words are counted, when John spake of Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" but if we carefully meditate upon these words, we will discover how much they contain for our edification and comfort, if we but receive them in true faith.

John calls the Lord a "Lamb," because He was to be slain, even as a victim is slain. All the sacrifices of heifers, oxen, calves and lambs, which took place under the Old Testament, were but types of that perfect and only efficient sacrifice, which Christ our Saviour offered to redeem the whole world through His own blood. To this the Evangelist refers in the above words, in which he dwells but incidentally upon the narrative of the passion itself. He calls Christ not merely a lamb, but "the Lamb of God," to express thereby the truth that God Himself had instituted this sacrifice, and would be well pleased with it. This expression, "Lamb of God," is further intended to arouse our faith to accept such a sacrifice, which God in His infinite mercy and love has made for our salvation. Yea, by it we are to be convinced that because God Himself ordained this sacrifice, it is really perfect and all-sufficient to accomplish what these words say, namely, to take away the sin of the world. In this expression, "sin of the world," is included all impiety and in-

justice which prevail in the world, and which cause the dreadful, but just wrath of God. Now all this wrong God has in mercy taken from the world, and has imposed it upon His Son, who paid our debt for us, that we might be exempt from fear and punishment.

We learn from this example how to preach rightly on the passion of Christ. We should not dwell chiefly upon the historical incidents connected with it, such as the betrayal, the scourging, the mockery, and the crucifixion of Christ; all this we ought to know and to preach; but this is not the most important lesson of the passion of Christ. Above all we must know and believe, as John preaches, that Christ suffered on account of our sins, which God cast upon Him, and which He bore in obedience to His Father's will and from love toward us. If we know this; if we understand our sinful condition, which would have plunged us without escape into eternal damnation, had not Christ become our Saviour, we will duly appreciate the importance and value of the suffering of our Lord, and will be comforted thereby when fear of God's wrath, on account of our sins, would overcome us. Such a consideration of the passion of Christ will not only move our eyes to tears and our hearts to pity, as is the tendency of the popish sermons on this subject, but will prompt us to feel, deep down in our soul, sorrow at the terrible results of sin, for which no creature, but only the Son of God could make atonement by His sufferings and death; and likewise it will cause us great joy, because we will realize that this sacrifice was made for us, that God will now no longer reject nor con-

demn us, as we have merited by our sins, but that He is now reconciled to us through the precious and vicarious death of His Son, who gave Himself as a victim in our behalf, so that our sins are now forgiven and we are made heirs of eternal life.

The Papists never preached thus of the passion of Christ. They also used the words "Lamb of God" as applied to Christ who took away the sin of the world, but their whole worship was arranged as if each individual had to bear his own sin and must make atonement for it himself. How else can we understand the stringent regulation in the Romish Church, especially in this season of the year, in regard to fastings, penances, self-inflicted tortures and other severe and burdensome works? Why were people so much in terror in regard to the minute, outward confession of their sins? Why did they bury themselves day and night in the churches and chapels, engaging in song and prayers? Was it not because they supposed that by such doings and observances they could and must work out forgiveness of their sins? Such doings mean in reality that we cannot rely, fully and solely, upon the sacrifice of Christ as all-sufficient and effective, and that we must with our own work complete the sacrifice and the atonement.

This contradicts directly the statement of John the Baptist, yea of Christ Himself, when in John 12. He thus speaks of His sufferings: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In these words Christ declares that His sufferings shall abound.

in much fruit. It would be erroneous to claim that the Christian must first of all bring forth good works, even as the branch and the vine bringeth forth grapes; this would indeed be one of the fruits of union with Christ through faith, but the most important fruit is indicated in the words of the Lord Himself when He says: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me;" that is, through me, through my sacrifice, through my death upon the cross, men must come to the Father and receive eternal life. They who rely on their own works, and desire by means of them to enter heaven, pervert the plan of salvation; they draw Christ down to them, whereas the reverse should take place. Christ must draw us to Him, or everything is lost. He alone has vanquished the devil, paid the penalty of our sins, rescued us from the world and death, and brought us to life through His sufferings and death. To all this we contributed nothing.

Again, John 3. chapter, Christ preaches of His passion in this wise: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." This is sufficiently plain. Whosoever desires to have eternal life, must obtain it through faith in Christ and His death upon the cross, wherewith He made payment for our sins and redeemed us from death and hell. In the words just cited, Christ mentions no work of man as efficient unto justification; He says nothing of alms, fastings and the like. The requirement of deeds came already through Moses, and in the ten commandments God laid down the

rules of conduct to be observed by us, and whosoever disregards them may expect the wrath of God and His punishments. He, however, who keeps the law, and fulfills its demands as much as he can, does not on that account get to heaven. There was no other remedy for the Jews in the wilderness, when bitten by the fiery serpents, but to look up to the brazen serpent which God had ordered to be made. In like manner, as Christ indicates in this passage, there is no other way unto salvation but faithfully to look unto Him who sacrificed Himself, according to the will of God, for our sins, and through whom we now have pardon and eternal life. Such a glorious result has the death of Christ; our works do not accomplish it, as the Papists falsely teach; they have nothing to do with it.

The prophets also frequently speak similar words. Thus Isaiah, 53. chapter, says: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." Surely, this is a most charming and comfortable passion-sermon, yea no apostle in the New Testament could preach one to surpass it. The prophet declares that Christ shall be stricken, smitten and afflicted in our behalf, and also that the chastisement of our peace shall be upon Him, and that with His stripes we are to be healed. Isaiah calls the Lord a physician, and directs us to Him to be healed in our distress and sickness, so that we may obtain health and happiness. The Lord has a remedy for us which is not

labeled good works, giving of alms, fastings and rosaries, but consists of the fact that He suffered and died for us, yea, that He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. If therefore the history of the passion tells us how our blessed Lord and Saviour was tortured by the Jews and the Gentiles, we ought to be mindful that all this happened that we, even we, might have a cure, not from bodily infirmities, but from a sickness more dreadful than all the rest, namely, from sin and eternal death. Thus the history of the passion will be applied by us properly and happily. It must, however, be borne in mind that the passion of Christ is in two ways a precious and sure remedy. It exhibits, in the first place, sin in all its ugliness and terror; no human being, not an angel, nor any other created being, had the power to take away sin; the Son of God alone could do it, and He did carry this crushing weight for us. We should therefore carefully and earnestly endeavor to avoid sin, in the fear of God, for it is so very easy to fall into it, and so very difficult to get out of it again. In this endeavor we will be mightily assisted by the consideration of the passion of Christ, which will prompt us, as a precious power against sin, to be pious and to shun evil; since it is such a terrible and dreadful burden, which no created being can remove, and which the Son of God had to carry for us. In the second place, we find in the passion of Christ a rescue from death; for he who fully believes that the Son of God died for his sins and paid his debt before God, can have a peaceful heart and need not fear death, but will trust in the mercy of God and hope for eternal salvation. Of this consolation the prophet

prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold ye prisoners of hope," &c. The pit, the prison-house of men, is sin and its punishments, namely, the tyranny of the devil and eternal death. From this pit we could not rescue ourselves unless by the help of God; not through the blood of heifers and similar victims, but only through the blood of the just One, the King of Salvation. He who is not in the covenant of this blood must remain in the pit of sin and eternal death, while he who is enrolled in it through faith shall surely come out from this pit of wrath to the enjoyment of the mercy of God and unto eternal life.

Daniel also preaches of this, in the 9. chapter: "Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness," &c. How this should be fulfilled in the death of Christ, the prophet soon after indicates. This is another clear and definite declaration of the truth, that forgiveness of sins and justification can be obtained only through the death of Jesus Christ; through it, if we accept it in faith, we have this precious treasure, and in no other way can we obtain it. Thus we can learn from John the Baptist, from Christ Himself, and from the prophets, how to preach of the passion of our Lord, namely, to instruct the hearts as to the mercy and grace of God, that they may be comforted thereby. Christ suffered for the payment of our sins, to reconcile us to God, and to save us through faith in Him as our Lord and Saviour.

The holy Apostles preached the same truth concerning the passion of Christ, as we can easily read in their narratives and writings. Of the many passages bearing upon this point we will now, in conclusion, notice but the one taken from Romans 5. chapter, as you, my beloved, have heard it in the beginning of this discourse. This passage is sufficiently plain, so that all can understand it. Nevertheless we will now dwell upon it somewhat, to our instruction, edification and comfort.

We all experience how deeply unbelief is rooted in our hearts, so that we are ever troubled by our sins, and lack all assurance and peace. We are so ready to exclaim: Ah, if we were only more pious, it would be better for us, and we could then hope for the mercy of God. Where the heart thus wavers, there is surely trepidation and uneasiness. But if we firmly believe, and rely on the mercy of God, which He has promised in Christ, our hearts will be securely stayed in all adversities upon this consolation, and will indeed be happy and of good cheer.

People, however, are perverse in this. The Pope has therefore established all manner of worship, by means of which, as he pretends, confidence in God and reliance on His help can be gained. Some of these inventions are worship of the saints, pilgrimages, the purchase of indulgences, the mass, vigils, monastic life, and other similar delusions. Such observances are regarded as guarantees of a renewed life and of heaven. This is indeed a deep-rooted delusion, and an earnest preacher of the truth will direct his efforts chiefly against it, to tear from the

hearts of the people, by the grace of God, this wicked unbelief and to instill into them true confidence and faith. How to do this properly, and with success, St. Paul teaches us in the passage under consideration; and, surely, his testimony is of great weight, as of one who was a great preacher, chosen and called of God Himself as a giant in the work of spreading the Gospel. We ought, therefore, attentively to heed his words.

He begins with the remark: "God commendeth his love toward us," which is indeed a peculiar and astonishing saying, but nevertheless, as we shall presently hear, a remarkable, precious truth. God, it is true, is the declared enemy of sin, and will punish it, as the law demands and as our daily experience proves. Again, it is true that we are all sinners, and this knowledge causes our unbelief of the mercy and love of God. When told, as in the passage before us, that God loves man, we think immediately of John the Baptist, of Peter, of Paul and others, who were so much more pious than we, and are ready to admit that God may love such as these, but we deny that we are such people as He can love, and therefore continue in fear of His wrath. Against this misconception the Apostle directs his words when he says that God doth not only love us, but that He even commendeth His love toward us; that is, God makes it so manifest, so sure and evident that He loves us, that no man can doubt it. What else but love could prompt Him to send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into this world, to die for us while we were yet sinners? When therefore sin and doubt torment

us, and would rob us of confidence in God's mercy and pardon, let us firmly hold to the eternal truth of this word: "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Who is Christ? He is the Son of God. What does He do? He becomes man and dies. Why does He die? On account of sinners. From this it clearly follows that God has not rejected sinners, and that He desires not their destruction, but that He loves them still, even so much that He rescues them from sin and death. For their sake His dear Son goes into death by the will of the Father. What better proof of His love could He have given? Surely, St. Paul has good authority for exclaiming: "God commendeth His love toward us;" and it behooves us to confess the precious, inexhaustible grace of God in Christ, and to believe that He is no longer wroth with us. Indeed, it would be utter madness to say that God will cast us away in anger, when it is evident that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for us wicked and forlorn men, that we might be redeemed, and have salvation evermore.

These words of St. Paul agree fully with the saying of Christ, John 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." How can one, who knows and believes that God loves him, be afraid of Him? For we all know what the character of love is. It is not contentious nor injurious, but trusts in Him, to whom it is directed, convinced that He will bring help and assistance. It is impossible to be otherwise. We should therefore cultivate this love, and

fondly cherish it, nor permit any one or any thing to rob us of it. It is the devil's especial aim to persuade or force us from this conviction that God loves us; he would fain have us fear God and regard Him as our deadly enemy. Where he succeeds in this attempt he has won the field. If we have lost our confidence in God, what then can defend or support us? Let us therefore resolutely repel all such insinuations of the devil, of sin and our conscience, as if God did not love us, but let us firmly hold to the eternal truth and consolation that, as an assurance of His love, God sent His Son into this world to die for us sinners—to save us even while we were yet sinners. What else is this but a proof that God has thoughts of mercy toward sinners, that He loves them and would help them from their misery? This consolation we derive, as St. Paul here tells us, from the death and passion of Christ, and we should be comforted thereby. When the knowledge of our sins depresses us, when our heart would question the mercy and favor of God, we should be quick to conclude that He cannot be our enemy, since He gave us His only begotten Son as a Saviour. Hence we dare assuredly depend upon His mercy and help, and have no cause of fear or despair.

But perhaps you will say: we know well enough that God gave His Son into death in our behalf, yet we, on our part, have by many transgressions and sins proved ourselves totally unworthy of this His grace and mercy; from which it follows that God has again become our enemy on account of our crimes, though He may formerly have loved us for

His Son's sake. St. Paul tells us that such reasoning is false, and that we should by no means give way to it, for he distinctly declares: "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners." Remember this, and be comforted by it. These words give us the explicit assurance, when our sins accuse us and threaten us with God's wrath and dire punishment, that Christ died for no other purpose than to save sinners, and for no other persons. If, therefore, we commit new sins, if our conscience accuses us, and if we have merited anew the vengeance of God, we ought ever to remember that Christ died for us as sinners,—for just such sinners as we are, and shall remain, though we may constantly exercise penitence and faith and new obedience with a good conscience. Yea, though we be ever so saintly, we will always need this consolation, that Christ died for us sinners, as St. Paul says: "Though I know of no sin, I am therefore not justified;" and the Psalmist, Psalm 143: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified." It therefore remains a fixed fact, eternally unalterable, that the passion and death of Christ took place for our sin, no matter when committed, and while we were yet sinners, and that therefore we are freed from the eternal wrath of God, that we have forgiveness, that the atonement is made once for all, and that we can now obtain eternal life.

St. Paul continues: If God so loved us that He justified us through His blood, and if we earnestly believe that our sins are forgiven for His sake and that we are now pleasing in His sight, we ought to

take comfort and rest assured that God will continue to be merciful unto us, and will save us in the end in heaven. He not only sacrificed Himself for us, but His life and victory are ours also.

The Apostle, when he spake these words, had in mind this severe tribulation, even of the pious, when they anxiously fear the wrath of God. He would fain give comfort by the assurance that God has averted His anger, and has employed mercy and grace toward us, even while we were yet sinners. If He did this then, how much less will He be wroth with us now after the redemption from sins by the death of His Son! This is surely a most effective sermon, preached against the unbelief which is so prone to nestle in our hearts. But Paul is not content with this assurance; he speaks of a still greater and more precious consolation to be derived from the death of Christ. He says: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Would to God that we might have this comfortable assurance firmly rooted in our hearts. It is indeed an inexpressible deed of mercy that Christ died for sinners; for by His death we are redeemed. If now His death benefits us so much, should we not also enjoy blessings from His life? If He died in our behalf, and if His death is our gain, we can unhesitatingly rely upon it that His life now will also be of benefit unto us: He will keep us by His grace, and will defend us from the devil and the world, so that our faith may increase from day to day. Accordingly we see, to our edification and consolation,

the Apostles directing our attention repeatedly to the joyous resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He who thus liveth after He died for us, will surely attend to our wants now, and will protect us in the true faith against all temptation. The Apostle would therefore encourage us in these words against all doubts and weakness of faith; he would tell us to put aside all terror of the wrath of God and of death, since our Father in heaven has so clearly commended His love toward us in giving His Son for us into death while we were yet sinners. If He did not spare this His most precious gift while we were yet in sin, He will surely bestow all blessings upon us now, since we have been cleansed from sin by the death of Christ.

Through Him and in His life we can have the power necessary to conquer death and hell; therefore we rejoice and trust in God, who loved us so exceedingly while we were yet sinners; yea, we know that for the sake of Christ, His Son, He will support us in our tribulations, and grant unto us in the end eternal life. Such a faith, and such confidence, is the Christian's true worship; we should therefore diligently seek it, pray for it, and retain it in our hearts. The Apostle Paul now concludes his exhortation to be of good cheer with these words: "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

He declares that we have received the atonement through Christ. We, on account of our sins, dared not hope for mercy from God. Now this is changed. Our sins are removed by the death of Christ, and

we know that God no longer chides with us; He is our Friend, yea, our beloved Father. What then must be the result of such reconciliation? This, that we rejoice at such a merciful and loving God—a God who is the source of all love, whom we should praise, and upon whom our whole confidence in every need and sorrow should be placed. If we have God for a friend we need fear no injury; nothing can then terrify or harm us. An atonement has been made for sin; God is satisfied with us, and Christ our Mediator sits at the right hand of the Father. What matters it now if death does come and lay low our bodies, since we know that through Christ we shall rise again unto eternal life? Hence the Christians ought ever to rejoice, no matter what their fortunes in life may be; though pain may afflict their bodies, they can be glad in the spirit, and will praise their Father in heaven, upon whose love and mercy they depend, and under whose protection they are secure. Such a happy issue from ills we have through the atonement made by the death of Christ.

Hence we see what a horrible crime it is for the Pope and his adherents to disregard this atonement, and to direct the people to do good works and to depend upon human exertions and deeds in obtaining mercy of God and forgiveness of sins. Let us thank God from the very bottom of our hearts that we have been set free from this bondage of error, and that we can learn from so many testimonies of the Old and of the New Testament how to regard and apply the passion of Christ, so that we are enabled to say, whenever sin accuses: If we were no

sinner, Christ need not have suffered for us, but since He did suffer, we will derive all consolation from His passion. Thus will we honor God and give thanks unto Christ our Lord. We can make no other return but to accept with heartfelt gratitude the precious gifts obtained by His passion and death.

If we do this, it must follow, as a necessary consequence, that we shun and hate sin, that amid various trials, by constant practice, we increase from day to day in faith, in love, in hope, and in patience. May God bless us in this endeavor, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

FIRST PASSION-SERMON.

THE OCCURRENCES AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

MATTH. 26, 36-46 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death : tarry ye here, and watch with me. And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done. And He came and found them asleep again : for their eyes were heavy. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest : behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going : behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

This is a beautiful narrative, and presents the true beginning of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. It is profitable both for doctrine, showing how our Lord conducted Himself in His sufferings, and for consolation in the anguish of sin and an evil conscience.

The scholastics disputed much and diffusely about the events here narrated. It is, indeed, no trifling matter that such great fear, trembling and anguish should take possession of this person, who is, at the same time, eternal God and true man. But let men dispute about this as much as they will, and let them be ever so penetrating and subtile, it can

never be fathomed! Yea, it is impossible to comprehend such grief and terror; they are beyond the reach of our minds, and this simply because the person who sustains them is exalted far above all things. We must, therefore, be content with understanding those inferior instances of sorrow or fear which we actually see. Such instances we have in the case of those poor wretches who are condemned to death for their crimes. Before these can become reconciled to their fate, they writhe in death's agony and struggle with death; and, sometimes, they cannot endure such anguish, and are even overwhelmed with fear, so that they can neither hear nor see, and do not understand what is spoken to them nor what they tell others, but are unconscious and even grow stiff, like one who knows neither where he is nor what ails him.

But here we must rather consider those whose grief and anguish are so intense, that they fear and tremble on their account; whose hearts are so pierced with wretchedness and terror that they would rather die than suffer them. Such excruciating pain is experienced by those hearts which wrestle with the fear of God's wrath or the violent onslaughts of despair. We may be assured that such great grief and terror assaulted our Lord on this occasion, so that He stood trembling and quaking before His disciples, who were affrighted and could not conceive what had befallen Him. This is beautifully indicated by Luke where he says that when the Lord "was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow;" and here by the Lord Himself in the words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," that is, I am so full of

anguish, that I could die of agony. Our thoughts cannot go beyond this; for we know of no anguish that transcends such anguish unto death. But even the pangs of death cannot properly be compared with the agony of the Lord Jesus; for His was of such exceeding violence that no human heart could have borne it. And for this very reason it declares Christ to have been true man, else it could not have affected Him, and true God, else He could not have borne and conquered it. Our flesh and blood can not endure and conquer thus; human nature, yea, even the nature of angels, is by far too feeble to hold out in such distress. For it was not the only sorrow of the Lord Jesus that the hour was now at hand, in which He should be betrayed by Judas, taken captive by the Jews, nailed to the cross by the Gentiles, and suffer death; but that the sins of the whole world were upon Him, and that the death He was about to suffer was a death incurred by sin and the wrath of God. Since He became a substitute for us all, and took upon Himself our sins, that He might bear God's terrible wrath against sin and expiate our guilt, He necessarily felt the sin of the whole world, together with the entire wrath of God, and afterwards the agony of death on account of this sin. This is the point which makes it evident that we can neither adequately speak of such sufferings and anguish, nor even meditate upon them. While each of us has merely his own sins upon him, Christ alone bears the sins of all the world and must atone for them with His death. How very insignificant, therefore, the agony of all other men! The sins committed by the whole world, from the first man,

Adam, to the judgment-day, are placed upon that one man who was born of the Virgin Mary, while our burden is so very trifling in comparison, and we still break down under it.

But what is this sorrow, anguish and trembling of the Lord to teach us? What benefit are we to derive from His fear and lamentation, and from His public confession that His heart is so filled with misery that He would rather not live? It was stated above that His being terrified at death should teach us that He is a true, natural man, possessing flesh and blood like ours, and that He is altogether of like mind with us, but without sin. For it is an innate quality of our human nature to shudder at the thought of death. But it is impossible that any other mortal should be moved with fear as great as that of the Lord Jesus, because upon Him rests the iniquity of all mankind, and because for this iniquity He must suffer the death which is merited by the sins of the whole human family. This, together with the fact that He really did bear this excessively great burden without succumbing or perishing under it, proves most forcibly that He is also God, and more than a man.

Therefore is this death-struggle a powerful weapon which we wield against the heretics, who teach that Christ was not true God and true man. For we are compelled to confess that both natures of Christ here show themselves mightily; that, while His sorrow and fear and His wrestling with death are a potent declaration of His true, natural humanity, His divine power is proclaimed by His submission to the will of God, and by His conquering that

agony which would have overpowered all men and all creatures.

But this conflict with death, besides being useful for doctrine and the strengthening of our faith, can be profitably employed by us in two other ways. Sin has so blinded and corrupted us poor mortals that we cannot sufficiently discern our own imperfections, else we would diligently guard against transgressions; for we perceive in ourselves and others that we regard sin as but a trifling injury, yea, more, that we delight in it. He who becomes enslaved to pernicious avarice does not hesitate to take twelve or fourteen per cent., and would think himself very prosperous if he could obtain a great amount of such usury. Just so it is with him whom Satan makes a slave to debauchery; such a one regards himself most fortunate when he can satisfy his sensual desire, and the gratification of his evil passions is his only ambition. This is the case too with other sins; we rejoice over our imagined success in committing them. All this misery originates in our not knowing what a dreadful calamity sin really is. If we could only comprehend the wrath of God which is revealed against sin, and His judgment which awaits it, we would no longer desire and love sin, but would fear it and flee from it as though it were sudden death.

This picture of our dear Lord's agony at the mount of Olives serves to furnish us with such knowledge and fear. For if we look carefully on this picture we shall behold an image of sin, at sight of which our hearts must recoil with horror. Only look earnestly at the person pictured here! He is the Son of God,—the everlasting Righteousness!

And although He assumed our flesh and blood, His flesh and blood is altogether sinless. Yet, since He took upon Himself foreign sin, namely that of all the world, in order to atone for it, this sin of others so affected Him, filled Him with such grief and anguish, and so terrified Him, that He began to tremble and quake, confessing: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

Now if the sins of others are able to inflict such agony upon this pious, innocent heart, what must not be the result if our own sins assail our naturally sinful and corrupt hearts, which are inclined to despair! God sometimes gives us instances of this result, that we may be influenced by terror; instances, in which sin rages in the soul to such a degree, that the poor miserable wretches destroy their own lives in order to be quickly released from such rackings of conscience. This is a certain sign that such sufferings of conscience are more grievous and intolerable than bodily death, notwithstanding that the latter is most violently opposed to our nature; for these wretched persons regard death as the means by which they can rid themselves of such sufferings. But it is a fatal means; for it is against that commandment of God which tells us, "thou shalt not kill." These people, therefore, only make themselves more worthy of God's wrath and of damnation. The proper means, by which we can with certainty get rid of this anguish, we shall consider hereafter.

Therefore, let us study this picture thoroughly, and not forget how our blessed Lord Jesus mourned and trembled at the mount of Olives. We should remember this especially when we are tempted by

the devil, our own flesh and blood, or the wicked world, and when we perceive our great propensity to sin. Then let us reason thus: if sin is so mighty that it can affect Jesus Christ, my Lord and God, with the greatest grief, though it be not His own sin, but entirely that of others; how much more will it not tempt, grieve, terrify and oppress me, who am myself guilty of every sin to which I consented, and who can, at any rate, only with the greatest effort resist the fear of death and of the anger and judgment of God! Therefore, get thee hence, Satan, I will not follow thee! Thou makest it easy for me to sin, as though sin were a trifling matter; but in my Lord Jesus I perceive that it is the most intolerable burden, because it so agitated His innocent heart. Therefore this narrative is of great value to us as an admonition to live in the fear of God and to sin no more. And most certain is it, if we bear this picture in mind, and, in accordance with it, persevere in prayer against temptation, that God will mercifully assist us by His Holy Spirit, so that Satan must flee and our flesh be kept under restraint; while they who do not keep this picture in view are led and driven like haltered cattle whithersoever the devil will.

Especially does the prayer Christ offered here serve as such an admonition. These were His words: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Now it is evident that this was not possible; for it was necessary that He should offer up His body for the sins of the whole world, and die upon the cross. But what else is to be inferred from this, than that sin is such a great and terrible transgression that it was impossible for any

creature to afford the least relief from its curse? But if we were to be delivered from this, it was necessary for the eternal Son of God to become man and to suffer death upon the cross for our sins; thus only could we become free from sin.

Therefore, again from this should we learn to know and judge sin correctly. If we desire to obey our own hearts and the devil, and to follow the example even of the world, it will be very easy for us to commit adultery and fornication, and to seek to profit by covetousness, by the practice of usury, and by extortion. We see this in the case of those who fall into such temptations that they can never get enough of sinning. O, do not serve your own heart, Satan and the world; let not the smooth fur deceive you, for it surely covers sharp, poisonous claws, and should these seize you it is all over with you, unless God succor you in an extraordinary way! For if sin could, in the manner we have related, assail and terrify Christ, who never was guilty of a single sin, what will become of you and me, whom sin has, at any rate, previously so corrupted that we can not do otherwise than fear, tremble and despair and fly from God, as did Adam and Eve in Paradise! Therefore, let us be on our guard, and not run wantonly into such danger. Let us ask God for His Holy Spirit, that He may assist us,—that we may by His help defend ourselves against sin. If we do this, we shall be indeed the better for the scene at the mount of Olives.

Let us proceed. Even as this scene has been employed by us as an admonition to fear God and to guard against sin, so does it serve, in the second

place, for our consolation. No man is able so carefully to govern himself that his flesh and Satan will not succeed sometimes to mislead him with their clamor, so that he makes a mistake and falls into sin. And Satan incessantly prowls around the Christian for the special purpose of leading him into public offences, as we can see in the case of illustrious saints. How deeply David fell! And Peter the same! Now if this should happen to us also, and Satan should then come and harass our hearts by his representations of our sin, then we should again behold this picture of the mount of Olives, and turn our thoughts inward and say: O God, why is it that Jesus Christ, my Lord, Thy Son, trembles so? What is it that troubles Him? He prays that the cup might pass from Him. What is this cup? It is the bitter death upon the cross and nothing else. But why does He suffer this death, being without sin, holy and righteous? Alas, this is brought about by the sin of the world, which God has placed upon Him; this it is that oppresses and alarms Him!

But how must I apply this? what must I contemplate here? This will I consider here, and believe that it is true: if God has placed my sin upon Him, then am I most certainly released from sin; and because this is so, John the Baptist calls Him "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." What accusation could I now bring against myself and my dear Lord Jesus? True, I am a sinner; I experience, alas! that my sins alarm me and that they always try to make me sad; I am afraid of God and His severe judgment. Nevertheless, of what could I accuse myself; and

how could I censure my dear Lord Jesus? He trembles at the mount of Olives, and feels such anguish that His sweat is as it were great drops of blood; my sins, which He has taken upon Himself, and whose heavy burden He has borne, have brought Him to this. Therefore, I shall leave them there, and firmly hope that when I shall appear before God and His judgment, God shall find no sin in me. Not as though I were pious and had committed no sin, but that God Himself has taken away from me my iniquity and laid it on His Son. Isa. 53.

Thus the scene at the mount of Olives also serves for our consolation; it assures us that Christ has taken our sins upon Himself and rendered satisfaction for them. For how could we otherwise account for such fear and trembling? If our sins, therefore, rest upon Christ, we can be content; they are in the right place,—just where they belong. Upon us they do not lie well; for we and all men, yea and all creatures, are too weak to bear a single sin: it would crush us with its weight. Therefore, let them remain upon Christ, and see what happens Him on their account. He takes them to the cross with Him and even dies in consequence of them; but on the third day He appears as the Lord of sin, death and the devil; for they attacked Him with all their powers, but accomplished nothing. Now this should be our comfort, and we should thank God for the unspeakable grace, by which He removed from us the heavy burden which would have hurled us into the abyss of hell, and placed it upon His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who, although He was sinless and God eternal, still toiled and drudged

under it at the mount of Olives, until the bloody sweat flowed gently from Him. To this comfort let us cleave, and not permit sadness to oppress our hearts, but say: it is sufficient that my Lord Jesus mourned and trembled so; my lamentations can accomplish nothing. But if I make His agony my comfort, and on it base my hopes in life and death, then has He so labored for me with His griefs and fears that I must in future be joyful in Him and of good cheer, and not fear sin and death, but hope for God's grace and eternal life. Such exercise of faith and comfort in Christ is the true worship of God, pleasing unto Him; and since this exercise is the only means, by which we can worship God truly, poor, troubled consciences should make use of it whenever the burden of sin tortures and alarms the heart. Otherwise it is impossible to find any true, certain consolation in such misery

But this history of the scene at the mount of Olives is also of use to us in teaching us, by Christ's example, how to conduct ourselves in times of fear, temptation and distress. The hour was now at hand when Judas should betray, the Jews capture, and the Gentiles crucify Christ. What does He do? He is "exceeding sorrowful" and full of fear. But this is not all. "He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed." We too must learn this; we dare not let trouble so affect us that we forget to pray. For it is also a necessary part of divine worship and pleasing to God, not to despair in anguish and distress, but, when these attack us, to lift up our hearts to Him, and seek His help. The 91. Psalm testifies to this, where God says: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I

will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him." But this is very difficult for us; for we imagine, when God suffers anxiety and distress to come upon us, that He is angry with us and is our enemy; and, therefore, even if we do pray, we think that our prayers are vain and useless. But against this we can employ the comfort of Christ's agony, and thus drive back such thoughts. For if God were always angry when He suffers pains and distresses to come upon us, it would follow that He was angry with His dear Son. But the reverse is the case, as Solomon also says, namely, that the father scourgeth every son whom he receiveth, and whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. Therefore, let no such thoughts deceive us; let us not regard God as an enemy because He permits us to suffer. We see here that He does not exempt His only begotten Son from suffering, but permits Him to feel sin and the agony of death, and to fear and tremble on their account. We should believe that God deals with us in the same way; that we are His children and that He desires to remain our Father, notwithstanding that He lets us suffer a little. For why would we be spared all those things, from which He did not exempt even His Only Begotten, whom He permitted to suffer that agony for us which we would have had to suffer forever in hell? Therefore, let us still follow Christ, and as we endure fear and distress with Him, even so let us learn to pray with Him, and doubt not that God will graciously hear our prayers!

And how did Christ pray? The prayer itself is a very useful and necessary pattern, which we should imitate, and never leave out of sight. He

prays : "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." This petition He repeats three times, until finally, as Luke says, "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him."

Now this is the model prayer which we too should use in temptation and trouble. "O my Father," He prays, as though He would say : although my present anguish and alarm are so great that they make me exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, and that I see nothing before me but Thy terrible wrath, and death ; still I do not doubt that Thou art my Father, that Thou dost love me, that Thou dost behold me and care for me. Therefore, I hope to be released from this agony. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me ;" that is, help me, and save me from these sufferings.

Even as Christ calls upon God, His Father, so must we also do. For, although He alone is the eternal Son of God, according to the 2. Psalm : "Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten Thee," yet we too are children and heirs of God by faith in Christ Jesus. We should, therefore, not merely utter these words in our prayers, but be fully confident that God, as our Father, desires our welfare, and will not forsake us, His children. For where such trust is wanting, there can be no sincere prayer, and there surely the thought is entertained that God is not our Father, that He does not want us, and that He is not concerned about us. But this is dishonoring God and robbing Him of His right name, "Father."

But let us learn still another lesson. Our dear Lord Jesus prays that His Father would let this cup pass from Him, and, as the true only begotten Son, He expects everything good of His Father. Yet He adds these words: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Let us do the same. Let us not on account of temptation and affliction think that God is angry with us; but turn to Him as the child turns to its father; for, because we believe in Christ, God will accept us as sons and as joint heirs with Christ; and let us call upon Him for help, saying: O blessed heavenly Father, see how hard it goes with me in this or that respect,—help, for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ,—suffer me not to remain in this distress or to sink under it, and so on. With this God is well pleased. And it is His desire that we all, in every need, have such confidence in Him, in and through Christ; that we, firmly relying upon Him as our dear Father, call upon Him; and that we do not doubt at all that He, for Christ's sake, will not only be merciful to us as His dear children, but also heartily sympathize with us and therefore willingly help us. Still we must humble ourselves, and not insist upon having our will, but submit it to the will of God whether we shall still continue in misery; and, if this is His will, show our obedience by patiently bearing such a delay of deliverance, as we can see that Christ here did.

But the question might here occur to us: why does Christ here pray thus, while in His prayer in the 17. chap. of John He does not use a single word which implies that He commits the decision, whether He shall obtain His request or not, to the

will of God? There He says: "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son. O Father, glorify Thou me. Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me. I pray that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Sanctify them through Thy truth." Also: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am," &c. This entire prayer shows that He will have His request granted and not denied. But why does He not pray in the same way here? Answer: the want, for which the Lord prays here, is a temporal, bodily want. Now we must, in all things pertaining to this bodily life, submit our will to that of God; for, as Paul says, "we know not what we should pray for." It is, besides, often necessary for us that God should leave us under the cross and in distress. Since God alone knows what is good for us, we should prefer His will and renounce our own, rendering obedience with patience.

When, however, bodily affairs are not the subject of our prayer, but eternal blessings, God's will is manifest and unalterable; it is His will that all men should be saved, that they should acknowledge their sin and believe in its forgiveness through Christ. Such eternal blessings we receive when God pardons our iniquity, upholds us by His Word, sanctifies us, and gives us the Holy Spirit and everlasting life; and such blessings as these it is that Christ implores for the Christian Church in John 17. Therefore, when praying for such heavenly, eternal gifts, it is not necessary to commit it to God's will, whether He will hear us or not. We should know that He will give us these things willingly and most certainly; for we have His Word which declares to us

His will in this respect. "God so loved the world," Christ tells us, "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Behold, here we have God's will with reference to our salvation. Boldly, therefore, let us pray in accordance with this will, just as Christ, John 17., prays: "Father, I will that they be where I am!" Be this also our prayer: Father, I pray and I will have it so, that Thou forgive my sins for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, who has expiated their guilt, having made an atonement for them by His death!

In this way, however, we cannot perceive God's will in regard to bodily temptation and distress. We do not know whether it would contribute to our salvation and to the honor of God, if He should, according to our desire, quickly release us from sickness, poverty or other troubles. We should, therefore, pray for help indeed; but submit it to the will of God whether we shall be helped soon or shall continue in our affliction. And should God not relieve us immediately, and in the manner we wish, our prayer shall still not be useless, but God shall strengthen our hearts and impart to us grace and patience, so that we can bear our affliction and triumph in the end. The example here of Christ proves this; God, His Father, would not let the cup pass from Him; still He sent Him an angel who strengthened Him. So it shall be with us too, even if God should delay or refuse His help. But in regard to spiritual wants we are certain of being heard: God will, for Christ's sake, cheerfully forgive our sins and save our souls; therefore, we can

pray for this with sure confidence, and it were a sin to doubt it.

This is the third lesson, about prayer in temptation. But we are very slow at learning it, as the example before us of the disciples plainly shows. Temptation was in store for them too, and, therefore, the Lord admonishes them to pray, so that they might not enter into temptation. For in such a case prayer is the only and the best preventive and remedy. But the flesh is so weak and sluggish, that when the danger is greatest and prayers are most needed we slumber and sleep; that is, anguish overtakes us and molests us so severely, that we think all opposition is vain and useless. Temptation or the fall is the result of this, as it was in the case of the disciples. But our gracious and compassionate God, who has promised us assistance and mercy through His Son Jesus Christ, pardons this weakness and rescues us from temptation, if we heed His admonition, again to seek consolation and help with Him.

This, then, is the history of the agony at the mount of Olives, which should be diligently considered and properly applied. This is done when we, in the first place, learn from it how very heavy a burden sin must be, since it so oppressed and tortured the Son of God that He trembled, and that great drops of blood fell from Him to the ground, and when we, therefore, look well to ourselves and flee from sin.

This is done when we, secondly, draw consolation from this history in those times of distress and

temptation which cannot fail to come upon us too; we see how the Son of God bore our sins.

We make the right use of this history when we, in the third place, continue instant in prayer, in every temptation, according to Christ's command: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

He who thus employs the occurrences at the mount of Olives, shall remain in the fear of God and in true faith, and shall find comfort and deliverance in all manner of dangers and temptations. May our blessed Lord Jesus grant this to us all through His Holy Spirit. Amen.

SECOND PASSION-SERMON.

THE SEIZURE OF CHRIST IN THE GARDEN.

MATT. 26, 47-50. And while He yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took Him.

This is the second part of the history of the events which took place in the garden. Here we are told, in the first place, how Judas, one of the twelve, after he had conferred with the Jews on the subject, and sold the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, (each of which, according to our coin, is worth about half of a florin), finally also betrayed Him in the garden.

This was a very wicked and scandalous deed, and it is, even at this day, so offensive to many wise and sensible people that, on account of it, they speak evil of the Gospel, and consider its doctrine injurious. For, since Satan keeps no holiday, but chiefly sows his tares among the wheat where he sees the good seed coming forth hopefully, it is no wonder that among those who possess God's pure Word there are found so many disciples of Judas, that is, knaves and infidels.

When the world sees such deeds it quickly passes judgment upon them. Thus we are often compelled to hear how our adversaries of the present day lay all the blame for such offences upon the

doctrine, and say: If the doctrine were correct it would also produce good fruit, but since there are so many more offences in the world now than there were formerly, it must follow that the doctrine is false.

True, the Insurrection of the Peasants, in the year 1525, occurred after the Gospel had been brought to light. Then followed the Sacramentarians, Anabaptists, and other sects, the like of which no one heard nor saw before the Gospel came to us. But does it, therefore, follow that the doctrine is bad, and that such offences were produced by the doctrine? We shall find the answer to this if we examine that villain, Judas, who was neither Gentile nor Turk; neither was he a Jew of that kind which offered resistance to Christ and paid no attention to the Word of God. Matthew says that he was "one of the twelve," whom Christ had called to preach, to baptize in His name, to cast out devils, and to perform all manner of glorious miracles. And since the Lord knew his knavery from the beginning, there is no doubt that He instructed Judas more than the rest, always admonishing him not to give place to sin and temptation. In connection with the Holy Supper the Evangelists specially mention that the Lord would every now and then let fly a word or two at him, if, peradventure, he might be turned from his sin. And, finally, He gave him a sop, no doubt casting upon him a longing look, as though He would say: O, thou poor fellow, how canst thou be my enemy? What cause do I give thee for intending such things against me?

But since nothing could prevail with him, and since he gave place to temptation and even yielded to it, the Lord said unto him: "That thou doest, do quickly;" as if He wanted to say: I see well enough that all warnings and admonitions are in vain; go, then; there is no help for thee.

Now what shall we say to this, that the desperate villain commits such a hideous sin, and harbors such malice and bitterness against his Lord and Master, in whose name he also had performed miracles, that, for the sake of a trifling sum of money, he betrays and sells the innocent, pious, gracious and gentle Lord and Saviour, well knowing that it would cost His life? Whom shall we blame for this? Here we read that he was one of the twelve. Shall we, therefore, say that the Lord Jesus and the doctrine which Judas heard of Christ are to blame? If Christ had taught him better things, would he have done them? But supposing that this thought did occur to you, would you not shudder at it, and fear so to accuse the Lord Jesus? For you know that He is holy and righteous, and the enemy of every vice; yea, that the object of all His teaching and preaching was to check and ward off sin and save from death. Why, then, would you impute such crime to our dear Lord? You should rather say: If Judas had not been such a scandalous, wicked villain that every friendly warning was thrown away upon him, and could not free him from his malice, he would have behaved himself differently; for, although the other Apostles were so very weak that they were offended because of the Lord Jesus, they still do not fall into sin so

monstrous as that of Judas, who must, therefore, have been such an arrant knave that nothing could save him.

Why then do you not pass the same judgment upon similar cases which occur at present? Why do you blame and blaspheme the Holy Gospel for that which wicked men and Satan have committed? For if Christ Himself cannot preach with such earnestness and power that Judas ceases to be a scoundrel, as he was from the beginning, it is no wonder that the like is seen among us also, and that not all obey the Word.

The Peasants' War, as stated before, followed after God had restored the Gospel to us; we have no desire to deny this. But must the Gospel, therefore, be reproached for this offence and mischief? Were there not insurrections and offences in the world before the Gospel was preached? We should rather argue as follows: Satan hates the Gospel; men are by nature corrupt and inclined to evil; therefore, Satan and the evil world have caused these offences, so that the good seed, which is the pure, wholesome doctrine, might be despised by men.

Thus originated the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists also, of whom no one heard before the coming of the Gospel. But the Gospel is not to blame. The devil, and then the temerity of idle and frivolous hearts which do not hold fast the Word, but follow their own wisdom, whistled for this jig, and prepared this terrible evil and such pernicious scandal.

Even at this day, as we see, this scandal prevails, that avarice and usury, lasciviousness and gluttony,

and other vices are more common among those who boast of the Gospel than they were formerly under the papacy. Whence comes this filth? Is it learned from the Gospel? Are the preachers to blame? No, such thoughts be far from us! That would be abusing and calumniating God and His dear Word, and the Gospel ministry which is God's most precious gift. But we must blame the very devil, who is chagrined when he sees the field well prepared and sowed with good seed; for this admirably impairs his kingdom. Therefore, while the house-holder sleeps, he comes with his seed of wickedness, and scatters tares over the whole field.

But thus he does not bring it about that the tares alone grow. For even as Judas, one of the twelve, was a rascal, while the other disciples, notwithstanding their frailty, did not fall into such shocking sin; so, while many and very common offences exist, we also find many noble, pious Christians, who abide in the Word in all sincerity, live in the fear of God and guard against offences. We should be satisfied with this and thank God for it. And since we cannot get rid of this Judas, we shall have to tolerate him, still remembering that not all are like him, but that some of the disciples turned out better.

The instance of the spoiled child, Judas, teaches us, first, that we must not revile the Gospel like the Papists, but recognize the true cause of offences in the devil and in those disobedient hearts which believe not the Word and will not be bettered by the Word.

Secondly, it teaches us, by that dreadful fall, to fear God. For, as was said above, Judas was no

common person, but an Apostle, and, doubtless, possessed many noble, excellent gifts; this is indicated by his having a special office among the disciples, the Lord having appointed him householder, or steward.

Now this Judas, who was an Apostle, who in Jesus' name preached repentance and remission of sins, who baptized, cast out devils, and did other miracles, apostatized most shamefully from God and became the enemy of Christ, whom, for a little silver, he sold, betrayed and delivered over to be slaughtered. And since such a terrible misfortune befell so great a man as Judas, we surely have reason never to feel secure, but to fear God; to beware of sin, and, without ceasing, to pray that God would not lead us into temptation, but that when temptation comes upon us He would mercifully sustain us, deliver us from it, and not suffer us to stick fast in it. For unless the greatest caution is exercised and the weapon of prayer is diligently used, it is a very easy matter to fall and commit sin.

The case of Judas stands thus. He was an avaricious fellow; the Evangelists mention several times that he was in the habit of stealing from the treasury, which, according to the Lord's appointment, was in his care. He gave the reins to this sin and became addicted to it. He permitted men to talk and to preach to him, as, alas! some of the miserable, provoking Christians of our day let themselves be talked and preached to; but went nevertheless and stole wherever he could, and thought himself in no danger because he was an Apostle as well as the rest.

Because he thus gave place to sin, his carnal security finally brought him so far that the devil entered into him quite, and urged him on to the attainment of his outrageous purpose of betraying his dear Lord and Master for fifteen florins. Since the devil was thus successful in leading Judas to this act of treachery, the greater wretchedness followed that Judas fell into despair and hanged himself on account of such sin. This is the end the devil had in view.

Now we should diligently observe this case of Judas and, as already stated, be admonished by it to keep a clear conscience; to live in the true fear of God; and not to cease praying that God would uphold us by His Word, rule us by His Holy Spirit, and keep us from sin. For if we make a mistake in an apparently trifling matter even, unspeakably great misery may ensue. Our dear Lord Jesus, in the 11. chapter of Luke, warns us against this, saying: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." We have instances of this before us. Before the blessed Gospel came to light again, the devil enjoyed perfect tranquility; he had ensnared nearly every heart by a spurious worship and by reliance on good works. But God has now banished him by the Gospel, that we might know that God is not served and that we are not benefited by the celebra-

tion of masses, by vigils, pilgrimages and monkery. God's Word has taught us a different form of worship, which the 2. Ps. calls "kissing the Son;" and God from heaven declared it "hearing and believing in His Son." This we know.

Let us see what takes place now. The devil would gladly come back to his old home; but he can not, for he finds the entrance blocked up and himself exposed by the light of God's Word. "Then goeth he and taketh to him seven," that is, innumerable, "other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there." We see that most men are under the impression that they can lead a lewd life, practice covetousness and usury, lie and deceive, and still be in no danger, and be good Christians all the while. Wherever there is a hole left open for the devil, even if we would think it too small for him to peep through, it is large enough for him to stick his head in and drag his whole body after. In this way he entered into Judas too. We might think his stealing ten or twenty dollars a very little matter; but because he continually hankered after the pleasures of this sin, and did not suffer God's Word to restrain him, the devil finally prevails on him, for the sake of money, to lead his blessed Lord and Master like an ox to the slaughter.

Hence the warning: Fear God and shun sin. But if you will continue in sin, you may look out for the danger, to which you thus expose yourself; for the devil does not go to work with the intention of conferring favors on you. He prompted Judas to avarice until he led him through despair to the gallows. Let this be your warning, and desist in

time! Earnestly beseech God that He would, for Christ's sake, not impute to you your iniquity, and then reform! This is the will of God. He permitted this dreadful example of Judas to be given that we might study it and recoil from it. For who would have thought that such a terrible sin could have such an insignificant beginning! O, do not make light of this; do not think in your heart: I can do so and so, and still be a Christian,—I will make amends some day, &c. The devil is too cunning for you; when he has once spun his web about you, it will not be easy for you to tear yourself away.

So much for the example of Judas. From another point of view our text furnishes us comfort and admonition. It is always the case, that, as our Lord Jesus fared on earth, so must His Church and precious Gospel fare to the end of the world. Judas, one of His disciples, betrays Christ. Thus, they who hold churchly offices and bear ecclesiastical titles and names, wish to be regarded as the heads and rulers of the Church; it is not thirty pieces of silver, as in the case of Judas, but many thousand dollars that make them traitors and arch-enemies of the Church. See the Pope, for instance; he has the very bag of Judas hanging from his neck, and is so fond of money and possessions that he takes them in exchange for the Gospel, which he betrays and sells, and with which he deals as the Jews dealt with the Lord Jesus before Caiphas and Pilate! And just as Judas attaches to himself the servants of the high priests and rulers, so the Pope gathers about him monks, priests, schools, bishops, and his entire brood of spiritless Sodomites, who

help him capture Christ, that is, persecute and denounce the Gospel, as if it were the most hellish heresy. And finally Pilate, the civil government, also joins them, and attempts to exterminate the Gospel with the sword.

This has been taking place a long time, ever since the Pope received such great power and authority. And even to-day the ranks of Judas' army are being swelled by those who use the Gospel for coining gold, with which they then feed their avarice, ambition, pride and lust. These should, indeed, consider Judas' end. For it has been resolved that neither the Pope nor any other traitors of Christ and His Word, let them be ever so exalted and wise, shall be blessed in the possession of that price of blood obtained by selling Christ or His Gospel. Sooner or later remorse shall come; and, should no amendment follow, these Gospel-venders, together with Judas their master, shall receive eternal death and damnation as their recompense, in the depths of hell. Let no one doubt this! Were it not for the denunciation of such a terrible doom, we should have reason for being indignant on account of these miserable fellows, Pope, cardinals, bishops, priests and monks, they fare so sumptuously every day. But, my friends, let us not envy these fattening hogs because God permits them for a little while to wallow in the filth of their obscene lusts; the thirty pieces of silver, for which they sell their Lord every day, will lie heavily enough upon their souls when Christ shall say to them: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Besides, their heart and conscience cannot be long satisfied.

For, although they may for a time live in thoughtlessness, security and riot, when eventually that little black dog, Remorse by name, begins to bark, it will go badly enough with them; then, with eternal ruin yawning before them, they shall see and feel what Isaiah meant in his 48. chapter, when he said: "There is no peace unto the wicked." We have instances before us at the present time of the terrible end which came upon several of the most prominent adversaries of the Gospel.

This we say with reference to Judas, of whom the Evangelists tell us how he sold Christ, led the Jews into the garden and betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss, which, according to Matthew, was the sign he should give the Jews. This is also applicable to those false prophets who, because they have the authority of office, mislead poor consciences with false and impure doctrine.

The Evangelist John mentions two remarkable miracles performed in the garden by our Lord Jesus. One of them is the following. When the Jews had come into the garden to the Lord Jesus, He asked them, "Whom seek ye?" And when they had answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth," His reply, "I am He," so frightened them that they all went backward and fell to the ground as if they had been struck by lightning. This was done by a special and divine power, which the Lord showed forth at that time, not alone to terrify the Jews, but also to strengthen His disciples. These, instead of venturing, as they did, to rescue Jesus by force, might have concluded from this display of power that if the Lord did not choose to give Himself up unto death, He was able to defend Himself and resist His

enemies without calling upon others for assistance or protection. The Lord wanted no violence done, and severely remonstrates with Peter on this subject, as we shall see. This miracle, therefore, serves as a protection against that gulf of offences, in which both the Jews and afterwards even the disciples came near drowning. Since the Lord suffered Himself to be seized, allowed the Jews to play on Him their wanton pranks, and finally permitted Himself to be so shamefully executed upon the cross, even the disciples were so offended that they forgot all those miracles which they had seen Him do and all those powerful sermons they had heard of Him, and thought that everything was over with Him now,—that their hopes had been all in vain. And, on the other hand, the unbelieving and malicious Jews felt certain that their object would be well accomplished as soon as they should have Him nailed to the cross.

How glorious, therefore, this miracle! The great multitude of Jews, armed with swords and staves, provided with authority from the rulers, and eager and desperate to do its work, is driven back and so frightened that they all fall to the ground as if some enemy had violently thrust them down; and all this by the single word, "I am He," spoken by a man who stood alone and weaponless, and who did nothing more than speak most friendly words. The disciples see this great miracle; the Jews also feel its force; still it is soon forgotten. Yea, because Christ so patiently submitted to His sufferings and used no other power against His enemies, they took Him to be a mere man.

But they should in all reason have argued as

follows: If this Man is able, with a single word, which is neither invective nor curse, but only a gentle reply, as with a thunderbolt, to strike down such great, strong, bold and armed men, then must there surely be a deep meaning in His voluntary resignation. He is able to defend and protect Himself, but instead of doing so He submits. He therefore does not desire the aid of men. And, although He now hides His power and permits the Jews to do with Him what they will, this shall, by no means, be the end of it. Dismay must seize His enemies, but He must conquer. For that divine power which He showed forth so frequently, and which He manifests here in the garden especially by the single word, "I am He," cannot remain withheld and repressed for a great length of time, &c.

The disciples in particular should have regarded the miracle in this light. There can be no doubt that it was to this end that the Lord here revealed His divine might. But alas! the effects of this were too quickly lost upon both parties. The Jews, intent on their mischief, feared no further. The disciples, running hither and thither, now sad, now terrified, had no hope of ever again seeing their Lord and Master, to say nothing of their despairing of ever being further benefited by Him. This was the "hour of darkness," as Christ calls it in the Gospel according to St. John, in which offences prevailed and the devil exercised His power. It was for this reason that the Lord so earnestly admonished the disciples, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

The other miracle is similar to this. It is performed by Christ's second answer: "I have told

you that I am He; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Our dear Lord is alone, and has neither sword nor spear; whereas Judas, the traitor, comes upon Him with a great multitude. We would think that our dear Lord had reason to entreat and beg, seeing that He stands against such numbers. But He advances and commands the Jews that they should let His disciples alone, and not lay hands on one of them. This is a stern command: *Sinite hos abire*, "Let these go;" and we see that it was not given in vain. For they, no doubt, set out with the thought that they would capture the whole company, Master and disciples. But this command compels them to desist from their intention of taking the disciples, although Peter did not deserve this, because he lay about him with his sword.

But why does the Lord give such a command? It is not incorrect to say, that He wishes to show by this that He esteems His own life more lightly than the lives of His disciples; for He rescues them while He lets Himself be taken and bound. For the same reason He calls Himself a "Good Shepherd" who "giveth His life for the sheep;" and shows us His love as a special example, saying: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We clearly see that He is silent about His own person; the Jews do with Him what they please and He does not hinder them. But He wants them to let His disciples alone and to do no violence to them. This shows that He cares more for them than for Himself.

This was not done without a purpose. Our dear Lord Jesus wanted no partners in the sufferings before Him. For, as the 53. chapter of Isaiah tells us, "The Lord hath laid on Him," on Him alone, "the iniquity of us all," and this He had to bear alone and for this offer Himself as a sacrifice. True, the disciples also were afterwards compelled to suffer for the sake of Christ and His Word, as Christ had told James and John: "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of."

But the suffering of the Lord Jesus was a suffering for my sins, for thy sins, and for the sins of all the world; so that now, for Christ's sake, God will not only forgive and pass by these sins, but also bestow righteousness and eternal life upon me, upon thee, and upon all believers. For this reason Christ desired to be alone, and permitted no one to be seized nor to suffer with Him.

This should be preached in all churches throughout Christendom, and with all diligence should the people be continually taught to hope for the forgiveness of every sin, alone through the sufferings and death of Christ, &c. But this is not done by the abominable Pope and his scandalous scribblers and shriekers. Their tongues, indeed, confess that Jesus is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; but their actions give their words the lie. This they prove by their so woefully deceiving the poor people with their falsehoods; telling them to invoke deceased saints, of these saints to seek pardon for their sins, and with the merits of these saints to console themselves, and in virtue of their doing this they receive indulgences. This is as much as saying that Christ desired associates

in His sufferings, and accomplished nothing by Himself.

That the Lord was afterwards crucified between "two thieves" has its peculiar signification, viz., to show for whom Christ's sufferings avail, and upon whom they are lost; of which, however, we have no time to speak at present. But here in the garden the word is: *Sinite hos abire*, "Let these go;" I alone am fit for this work; to suffer and to die for the sins of the world is an office which belongs to me alone. Neither John, Peter or James can do anything in this; let all these go their way! I, "I am He;" me you must lay hold on, me capture, me bind, me crucify, unto me it is given to take away the sin of the world; and all who believe in me, that is, comfort themselves with my suffering and death, shall find a gracious God and eternal life.

This, then, is the second part of the history of those things concerning Christ which occurred in the garden. It teaches us: first, to bear in mind this terrible fall of the Apostle Judas, to abide in the fear of God, to avoid sin, and to be diligent in prayer that God may in mercy prevent us from falling as Judas fell; secondly, that we also, as true Christians, shall be sorely molested by the avarice of some Judas or other, that we must patiently endure this and cling to the consolation that Christ, though He may be weak in us now, will show His power at the proper time, and graciously protect and preserve us. The Ever-living Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ grant us this by His Holy Spirit. Amen.

THIRD PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST REFUSING TO BE RESCUED BY PETER'S SWORD.

MATT. 26, 51-56. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled.

This is the third and last part of the scene in the garden, or at the mount of Olives. It relates how Peter drew his sword, intending to rescue his Master by force, after they had taken the Lord Jesus.

The facts here narrated, in the first place, teach us a necessary and useful lesson concerning the sword, or temporal power, showing who shall and who shall not wield it, and what punishment is due to him who presumes to bear it without a call. Secondly, whereas Peter in this case makes use of the sword to liberate Christ, and still Christ forbids his doing so, it becomes necessary here to treat the question, whether we dare or should defend the Gospel with the sword, so that the civil government may be properly instructed in both respects, and neither act contrary to its office, nor do more than its calling demands. Otherwise both Church and State would be unjustly dealt by, which injustice would be most certainly punished.

Now as far as Peter is concerned, it is manifest that he was a minister or ecclesiastic, whom it does not behoove to bear the sword, according to the words of Christ: "The princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion. But it shall not be so among you." Therefore, Peter does wrong in resorting to the sword for the Lord's protection, and Christ rebukes him for it. This was not a matter that could be decided with the sword, for Christ says: Even if our cause did depend upon our defence, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" This was as much as saying: It is now expedient for me to suffer; I will not have any one to draw his sword on my account and strike for my protection. But Christ administers this rebuke to Peter for the reason, also, that to him as a private person the sword did not belong. Therefore, He not only commands Peter to put up his sword, but also pronounces the terrible threat: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

We must duly heed these words; for by them the Lord makes a distinction among men, informing us that some wield the sword by divine commission. These are all they who, by the proper and ordinary means, are called to the temporal government for the purpose of ruling, of guarding and promoting the public weal, and of preventing public offences. Into the hands of these God gives the sword, that is, it is God's will and institution that they bear the sword, not for their own emolument, but for the good of their subjects, as St. Paul says: A ruler "is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." For

since words will not persuade the world, severity must be used, and people must be compelled to desist from crime, so that the common peace and unity may be maintained and a restraint be put upon wantonness. If the thief persist in stealing, let him dangle from the gallows, and then we shall be secure from him. Let the wanton villain who takes delight in injuring every one, and who strikes and stabs for the sake of a mere word, find justice on the gibbet, and then he will let people alone; he will henceforth strike and stab no more, for the hangman puts an excellent stop to such work. Therefore, the civil government serves God by using the sword against sin and scandal; for God, who will not leave offences and sin unpunished, has given the command to do this. God makes this distinction among men, that to a few He intrusts the sword, with it to ward off mischief and to protect the subjects.

But the rest, who have not received such authority, must, by no means, handle the sword, and never draw it except at the command of the temporal government. But should they take it on their own responsibility, the judgment written here will most certainly not fail: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." In every history we see how they who took revenge into their own hands never succeeded well with it; all rebels had to suffer finally and perished with the sword. All manslaughterers who wickedly murdered others were either delivered to the executioner or perished in some other way, or else went so astray in the miserable life they led that they would a thousand times better have died. Such is the regulation of God;

He will have it so, that all they that take the sword, and do not wait until God or the government gives it to them, shall perish with the sword; this cannot be changed. Let every one, therefore, be careful and bridle his wrath; let him either patiently bear his wrongs and subdue his passion, or else seek justice in the proper and divinely sanctioned way. What this is, has been sufficiently pointed out. Since God has given temporal governments the command to restrain offences and defend the pious with the sword, we must seek safety at the hands of these governments and inform against the offender. We must do this not alone for our security, but also to the end that offences be resisted, that malice be hindered, and that they who exercise temporal authority may properly discharge the duties of their office. For neither a mayor of a town nor a ruler of a land can be acquainted with every disturbance, and still their office makes them responsible to God for the quelling of all offences and uproars. Now if you and every body else would choose to keep silent about your wrongs, this would only increase the mischief and be giving the occasion for your own hurt, both of which results would be wrong, and both of which you can prevent by calling upon the government for protection. Should the government, however, upon your petition do nothing in this matter, and not help you to your rights, then observe this: Bear your wrongs patiently and beware of revenging yourself, lest your righteous cause become unrighteous before God and man.

But what then becomes of the words of Christ: "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will

sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also," &c.? We answer: Both of these commands were given that we might be restrained from taking revenge into our own hands, and that we might rather suffer all things, and wait for the judgment of the Heavenly Judge, who is not so slow and heedless in conducting His office, as the civil authorities frequently are in conducting theirs. Christ here does not forbid our complaining to the government of the injury that is done us; He does not impose silence upon us.

But, you ask, do I not seek revenge when I make complaint against him who has harmed me? Most certainly; but you do right by this, provided you do it in the proper way and without anger or hatred towards your neighbor. For this is not your own revenge, but the revenge instituted by God for the purpose of checking scandal and protecting every one in the possession of his own. In short, he who has not been commanded to use the sword and still arrogates it to himself, to revenge himself or others, subjects himself to the judgment and condemnation of God: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Whenever, therefore, you or yours are injured, beware of the improper course of grasping the sword yourself and being your own defender! But make use of the correct means, that is, bring the matter before your government and let this protect and succor you; God commanded it to do this and ordained it for this. If you do this you do well, and will be safe against meddling with the affairs of others. But if the government either will not or can not help you, then endure your afflictions, touch not the sword,

and let God be your Avenger; He surely will avenge you and also punish the government for its negligence!

But should a cut-throat come upon me in the forest, or a ruffian attack me on the highway, with the intention to harm me, and I had no time to seek the protection of the government, must I suffer myself to be injured or murdered? No; for in such a case the government permits every one to defend his person and his life against violence and outrage; for whenever she can lay hold on these villains, she executes them without delay. For this and other reasons Moses, according to the command of God, prescribed the appointment of several cities of refuge, to which the manslayer might resort who had taken life not intentionally, nor for revenge, nor in wrath, but accidentally or in pressing necessity. The civil authorities also follow this rule and recognize the lawfulness of self-defence. But in all other cases remember that "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

But as they who, having no right to the sword, still continue to usurp the power of the sword, do not seek lawful vengeance and wish to administer vengeance themselves; even so, on the other hand, they, to whom God has given the sword that they might diligently wield it, are always inclined to be too mild, as though God had given a fox's tail into their hand instead of a keen-edged sword. These latter also commit great sin and are grievously disobedient before God, and they also shall be very sorely punished for their conduct. For where the civil government does not oppose public scandal with reasonable severity, there God Himself

must eventually interfere as Judge and use the sword. And at the advent of this Judge, not only an individual or two, but an entire city or land must suffer for these sins. This we learn from many passages of Scripture and from numerous instances before us. It is, therefore, necessary that magistrates do not become lazy or indulgent, but that they exercise a becoming earnestness and a vigilant supervision, and that they apply punishment wherever offences exist; thus they satisfy the demands of their office and please God. But, as we have already said, this is an unpleasant duty; men take no delight in it, as can be shown by examples. For how often do we not find mildness used where it should not be used, and the most heinous offences lightly punished! How frequently are not hindrances interposed, and intercession made, so that crimes escape unpunished!

But should we not have more regard for the divine command than for human intercession? God says: Receive from my hand this sword; I give it thee that thou shalt, in my stead, punish every one under thy control who is guilty of public offence, no matter whether he be friend or foe, exalted or low, rich or poor, noble or ignoble; let the sword descend wherever there are offences, so that these may not prevail! This is what God says to every government. But, on the other hand, men come with their petitions, asking that this or that one might be pardoned, or punished mildly, although the most terrible trespasses, *atrociosa delicta*, have been committed, such as brutal murder, incest, and the like, &c. And it often happens that man's intercession has more influence upon the govern-

ment than the stringent command of God. I leave it to you to judge whether this is right, and what must be the result under God's justice.

Sometimes offences are public, but the civil government refuses to punish them unless some one volunteers as plaintiff. Because no one brings complaint, it lets the matter pass. This is downright heedlessness, both in regard to God's command and to the office. The watchman is stationed on the tower, by day and by night to be on the lookout for fires or other mischief that may occur within or without the city, and then to publish the danger in time, and to warn against losses. In like manner God has placed the temporal ruler far above all other people, that he might exercise watchfulness, and when he sees offences about to be committed, be they great or small, to put them down with the sword before they become formidable, no matter whether any one has complained or not. Therefore, "he beareth the sword," as Paul says, to be "a terror to evil works," so that peace may be enjoyed by all and wantonness may be resisted. And the Lord commands here that the sword shall not rest nor be idle, but destroy those who take it. Thus we see that both parties fail to do their duty: they who have not the sword, wish to have it and lay about them with it, like Peter here; but they who have it, can with great difficulty be persuaded to grasp and wield it.

But they who really understand and obey this passage will act differently. They, into whose hands God has not committed the sword, will, of course, let it alone, and rather suffer all things than presume so far as to take it; and this, because they

recognize the command of Christ and the ordinance of God, which they feel certain dare not be trifled with, and against the violation of which they guard as against the executioner, the gallows or the wheel. And they, to whom God has given the sword, will cheerfully and fearlessly sway it over one and all, regardless of their subjects' station and property; for they know that they are bound to check scandal wherever they meet it, and, therefore, they obey God and serve Him eagerly. This must suffice for the first point.

The question which we stated in the beginning now claims attention. As private persons are absolutely forbidden to grasp the sword, and the Lord reproves Peter for drawing his sword in Christ's behalf, would it then be lawful for a government to defend itself when attacked on account of religion? Or, in plainer terms: considering that Christ did not permit Peter to rescue Him with the sword, are rulers permitted to resist attacks made on the Gospel, and to instruct their subjects everywhere to defend it with the sword?

It is necessary here, first, to observe the distinction between the civil government, the office of the ministry, and the private person. The civil government, above all other duties assigned to it, has received the emphatic command to disseminate and apply God's Word, and with the sword to protect those subjects who are oppressed on account of the Word. About this there is no question whatever; for the sword must protect virtue and punish vice, and, above all, serve to promote the knowledge of God, as we infer from Rom. 13. And God says in Isa.: The Church shall "suck the breasts of kings,"

that is, they shall be her protectors; and, in the 24. Ps.: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

But ministers of the Gospel and private persons are not the civil government; therefore, neither ministers nor private persons dare draw the sword, for they have received no command to this effect. Peter, at that time, did not understand this so; for he did not know that the ministry would be an office void of royal and princely favor. Peter should not, therefore, have drawn the sword. But all temporal authorities are obliged to shield God's Word and the true Church. Had God ordained them as swineherds, then their only duty would be to protect the throats and care for the corn of their subjects; but, as it now is, they must, first of all, preserve the honor and knowledge of God in the human race, perpetuate the true worship of God, punish and exterminate false doctrine and idolatry, and rather hazard everything than suffer themselves or their subjects to be forced into idolatry or falsehood. Therefore the 2. Ps. says to them: "Kiss the Son," that is, receive and protect God's Word!

This is the civil ruler's noblest duty. We see in history that God imposed this duty, and that the Holy Spirit highly extols not only the pious Jewish kings, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Hezekiah, but also the kings of the Gentiles, e. g. Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Cyrus, because they instituted the true worship of God and violently opposed the worship of idols.

This being the office of the civil government, it follows that she must, as long as she can, protect and preserve herself and those belonging to her

against the attacks of the ungodly and never give way to these assaults; for it is impossible that they who persecute God's Word and carry on idolatry, should have the Holy Ghost. For what would be the result should she refuse to do this? She alone bears the sword; and her subjects dare not take it even in case she herself refuses to use it. The inevitable result must be that success would crown the efforts of the wicked, the Word of God would be extirpated, God's pure worship would cease, and the old idolatry would be re-established!

Now who is willing to sanction this and, by sanctioning it, to heap upon himself such great and terrible sin? yes, who will dare to do this, knowing that it is written: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way;" further, Lev. 24: "He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death;" also: "Flee from idolatry;" and again: "Rulers are a terror to evil works?" And now, since the establishing of idolatry is an evil work, they who have the sword are not only permitted, but also seriously commanded, with all boldness to shield and save themselves and theirs from this evil by the sword. On the subject of self-defense, you may find the answer to the question, whether subordinates may defend themselves against those superiors who exercise public tyranny, as against notorious murderers or highwaymen, by reading the Admonition to the German People, and other works which specially treat on this subject; it would occupy too much time at present.

But here we speak of those alone who have the sword, that is, who are in office. Now if bishops,

for instance, who are of that class of people that has not the sword, deprive their subjects of one of the elements in the Holy Supper, or inflict upon them other manifest errors, these subjects, although they ought, in such cases, to obey God rather than men, and although God seriously requires such disobedience to their commands, dare not draw the sword on account of such errors, but must bear them, if they would not use the sword like Peter, who had not been commanded to do so.

But you say that a Christian must tolerate injustice and violence, and not oppose them by force. I answer that the subject of which we now are speaking is the civil government, who is the sword-bearer; and she has sufficient violence done her when other governments destroy her peace and attack her in war. Let us regard these her sufferings as severe enough, and not impose still further burdens upon a Christian government! He who afflicts her still more, and even snatches the sword out of her hand, virtually gives his consent that the enemies of truth shall exercise their malice without restraint, and even deprive us of God's Word. There is time enough for giving such consent, when the government is not able to protect the truth. But as long as we can hope for her help, and as long as the matter depends upon the help of God and reposes in His hand, it is our duty to venture and to suffer, so that we may not be accused of being more mindful of favor, peace, and the like, than of God's Word and the salvation and well-being of the subjects.

Ever clear and plain, therefore, stands the command: *Osculamini filium; Hunc audite*, "Kiss the

Son;" "Hear ye Him;" "Flee from idolatry," &c. Such commands as these require of the worldly ruler that he oppose not merely worldly or temporal offence, but also false doctrine and false worship. But by what means must he do this? What means has God given him? Read St. Paul's 13. chapter to the Romans, where you are informed: "He beareth not the sword in vain." But against whom shall he bear it? Against those who defend false doctrines and idolatry, and who seek to compel others to accept heresy and false worship. This the Christian government dare not tolerate. For the heavenly Lord of lords has forbidden it, and declares that God is worshiped and His Word lauded when we jeopard peace, the favor of men, and the like, rather than sanction that which militates against God's Word.

This, then, is the import of Peter's unauthorized attempt at liberating the Lord by fighting with the sword. But in our text we find yet another sermon, which is a reproof designed especially for the Jews, who had been instructed by their proper government to take swords and staves, and with them to attack the Lord Jesus. Still they receive the Lord's reprimand. "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me."

With these words the Lord rebukes them for a twofold reason. In the first place, even when the civil government puts the sword into her subjects' hands, they must not take it if they are expected to use it in an unrighteous cause; and, secondly, they should not have taken it to use it against Him,

their Lord. For He was no murderer. It was the doctrine that was in question. Doctrinal disputes are not to be judged and decided by fire and sword in imitation of the Papists, but according to the Scriptures. If we are heretics, as they accuse us, then let them prove it from Scripture, and leave the hangman at home; he has no business with such disputes.

But as the Jews dealt with Christ, so the Papists, their disciples, still deal with Him. They can not and they will not enter upon a debate, unless their doctors and papal decrees are recognized as having equal authority with God's Word. But since we refuse to recognize them as having such, they come out against us with swords and staves, as did the Jews against Christ. I suppose they do this so that every one can see that they are of the same breed with the Jews, to whom the Lord says, Jno. 8: "Ye are of your father the devil," for "ye seek to kill me." This applies admirably to these blood-hounds, the Papists. But we, who, like Peter, have not been called to use the sword, must suffer these things. God, however, in His own good time, will punish such cruel despotism, and mercifully deliver His own from the fury of these blood-thirsty tyrants. Amen.

FOURTH PASSION-SERMON.

THE LORD JESUS LED TO ANNAS AND CAIAPHAS AND TRIED BY THE JEWS.

MATT. 26, 57-68. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God; that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?

We have heard how our Lord Jesus was betrayed by Judas in the garden and taken by the Jews. Now we come to notice how He was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest, under such charges as to lead to the unanimous decision that there was sufficient cause for delivering Him to Pilate and aiming at His life.

In describing these things so carefully it was not the only object of the Evangelists to teach us the holy innocence of our Lord Jesus. That He was wholly pure and altogether without sin we must conclude from the known fact that He was the Son

of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. But, since the Church and the Gospel must receive the same treatment in the world which the Lord Jesus received, the history of Christ's wrongs is given us especially to the end that we may not be offended when similar wrongs are inflicted upon us also, but that we may always refer to it for consolation and learn to be patient. For if God's Son, our Master and our Head, was falsely accused, delivered to Pilate by the high priests, scribes and elders, and surrendered to the Gentiles to be crucified, is it to be wondered at if we receive similar treatment? The servant is not to be more successful than his master. Therefore, we should rejoice when our experience is such that we can truthfully boast: This was the experience of my Lord Jesus also. For if we are like Him in suffering, we are warranted in the hope of being like Him in glory too; yea, and even before the revelation of this glory, we shall, in our suffering, derive from Him comfort, aid, deliverance. This history, which shows that even our Lord Jesus was not exempt from suffering, serves, therefore, first, to minister unto us consolation, that we may become more cheerful and more patient in our sufferings.

And, secondly, it offers us an antidote against the common offences of this world. For every one regards the titular dignitaries, called chief priests and elders of the people here, as pious men and saints, in virtue of their office, station and pomp. And so to-day the Pope, bishops, monks and priests desire, on account of their office, to be looked upon and treated as the most eminent members of the Christian Church. But let us learn here not to

judge men by the office they hold, else we shall be deceived; but by the manner in which they act towards Christ—by the relation which their heart, their will, sustains towards Him. When, by this text, we find good or evil in them, we must judge them accordingly; for then our judgement shall always be just. The office is, without a doubt, a holy and a good one; but he who holds it may be a villain. For here we see that the high priests, the scribes and the elders, who are the rulers and leaders of the people in spiritual things and in things temporal, are the very ones who cannot tolerate the Lord Jesus and who, by dint of unremitting persecution and manifold intrigues, finally bring Him to the cross. We must confess that they are God's worst enemies and also, as Luke testifies in the 5. chapter of Acts, Epicureans, who in those days said that there is no resurrection from the dead, neither angel nor spirit. If we would, therefore, know to a certainty whether Pope, bishops, and the like, are pious or not, we must not be misled by their office; but need merely see how they conduct themselves towards the Gospel and the true doctrine, when we shall find that all of them are disciples of Judas, and that their hearts are disposed towards the Gospel as were those of the high priests towards Christ. These are the very fruits by which we may know the false prophets, the wolves, even when they come in sheep's clothing and have the appearance of devout and harmless persons.

We shall now take up the trial of our Lord, and see with what hatred, malignity, craft, and virulence they treat Christ.

The Evangelist John mentions that the Jews led the Lord Jesus first to Annas, who, according to Acts 4., was also a high priest, but not in that year, and who was the father-in-law to Caiaphas, who officiated at the time. But Annas soon gave Him over to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that same year; for with him the chief priests and elders were already assembled.

Here we see, in the first place, how inequitably the high priests deal with the Lord Jesus; for they are at the same time both plaintiff and judge. The Lord could, therefore, not receive justice, let His cause have been ever so good, and let Him have said and done what He would. Such a way of proceeding would be very dishonorable in a worldly law-suit, in which the same person is forbidden to act as plaintiff and judge by a special law. But nothing is sinful for these holy ones; they have all power; they can do as they please, and think they have the right to do so! Woe to him who construes their actions ill, tells them they are in the wrong, or admonishes them!

Just so our spiritless tyrants, Pope, cardinals and bishops conduct themselves. The Pope has for many successive years been causing us Germans to gape in expectation of a Council, at which, as he has been pretending, he would abolish the dissension existing in religious matters. And, on our part, many serious efforts have been made at many an imperial diet, and on other occasions, to secure a free, Christian Council, at which to end the present disunion by means of the Holy Scriptures. But it is the manifest desire of the Pope to treat us and the Gospel as the Jews here treated Christ. He is

a party in the case; accusation is brought against the blasphemous dogmas and counterfeit cultus which he has insinuated into the Church, in spite of God's Word, and upon which he still insists; what should he, as the defendant, do? If he himself is to be the judge, he will not declare himself in the wrong and decide in favor of his opponent, the plaintiff. But upon such a course as this the Pope and his parasites—these honorable men!—strenuously insist. Yea and more, when a Council is held he takes public part in it, while we, previously condemned by him, obtain neither vote nor seat. This is a wanton, unjust and grievous procedure.

But here we have the proof that the world does not desire and is not able to deal otherwise with Christ. We should, therefore, be resigned, and, with the Lord Jesus, bear such injustice until the appointed time; for what else can we do? Caiaphas, who, as judge, sat in the judgment seat, himself accuses the Lord Jesus and then even decides against Him. This is the first act of injustice in the trial before the priests.

Another atrocious feature of this trial we find in their absolutely demanding the death of the Lord Jesus, while they cannot find sufficient cause for this, but must call to their assistance falsehood and false witnesses, until finally Caiaphas, the judge, himself arises and brings forth an accusation possessing some semblance of foundation. Among other false testimony submitted, was that of "two false witnesses," who came "and said: This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

The correct history of this latter charge we find in the 2. chapter of John. When our Lord Jesus, in Jerusalem, at the first passover after His baptism, had with a scourge driven out of the temple the changers of money and the merchants, together with their oxen, sheep, doves, and whatever else they had, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrown the tables, the Jews gathered together and said: Thou venturést to exercise special violence here; hast Thou authority to do this? What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Then the Lord answered them thus: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." By this He meant to say the same as by the sign of the Prophet Jonah, Matt. 12., namely this: You desire a sign and shall have it. You shall kill me; but on the third day I will raise myself from the dead. He for whom such sign does not suffice is past all help. This is the narrative.

But see, how wantonly they pervert His words! He says: "Destroy this temple;" and then they charge Him with having said: "I am able to destroy the temple," thus to make Him appear guilty of having spoken against the temple of God. And even if we accept the Jews' interpretation of Christ's words, admitting that they were spoken with reference to the temple at Jerusalem, would a man be guilty of death on account of using such words? In short, he who would make charges against Christ, must first become a base liar; our Papists also are a living proof of this. What they cry out against the Gospel is bare falsehood. They are dead to every sense of shame, daub their notions into other men's books and belie us, saying that the

holy sacrament receives scandalous treatment at our hands, that we throw against the wall what remains of the cup, and that we tramp with our feet what is left of the consecrated bread. Are these not gross, palpable lies? Why, common bread and wine is not treated so, but is preserved. How much more would we then not keep decently that, of which we confess and teach, in opposition to the Sacramentarians, that it is not mere bread and not mere wine, but the true body and blood of Christ, given for us upon the cross and shed for our sins! But we need not wonder at the Papists' lies. He who deals in falsehoods can speak no truth, and he who acts contrary to truth cannot help himself except with lies. On this principle the world, as we here see, dealt with Christ, and will continue so to deal with the Christians and the Holy Gospel; for it cannot do otherwise.

But when their witness agreed not together and was powerless in itself, Caiaphas, the judge or high priest, rushed to the rescue, and, according to John, asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine, as though he would say: What is this new doctrine Thou bringest? Art Thou dissatisfied with Moses? Must Thou have something extra? Art Thou alone wise and are all we fools? Where are they now who regarded Thy doctrine right and divine? It may be such a good doctrine that we too would be pleased with it and receive it. But it is merely the rabble, which knows nothing about the law, that Thou attachest to thyself; the honest and upright desire not thy preaching. To such question the Lord answered: "I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort;

and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said." The Lord does not desire His doctrine to be despised, and says that He had not feared the light, but had preached it openly to the world, that it should, therefore, not be reviled as a thing done in a corner.

When He had thus spoken, a scoundrel standing by dealt the Lord a severe blow with the palm of his hand, as though it were intolerable that the high priest should be thus answered and not more reverently treated. Even to-day we see such priests' slaves, who are ready to defend with the sword the sacrilegious doctrines and shameful, sodomitical life of the Pope and his shaved and shorn train. And then we also find those vain prattlers, jesters, mountebanks, and the like, who would serve them faithfully, and whose only object in blaspheming and reviling the holy Gospel is, to receive the favor of their bishops and of the idol at Rome. This we must suffer, indeed, as Christ also suffered it, but dare not connive at it, nor forbear rebuking and publishing such vice. We must do as Christ here does: He addresses the servant, and tells him that he had smitten Him unjustly, but does nothing further.

When they now found themselves without any cause of action, Caiaphas, the high priest, comes to the main point, saying: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Knave Caiaphas thinks thus to hit the nail on the head, and to seize the Lord Jesus by the throat. Observe here, first of all, that it is not the intention of Caiaphas that he

or the rest should believe in the Lord, in case He should say that He is the Christ. By no means! But this is the very confession they desire to hear Him make, thinking that then they could convict Him without difficulty. And Christ understands them well enough; but this does not induce Him to deny who He is. He answers: "Thou hast said," that is, just as thou hast said, I am the Christ. And what is still more, it shall only be a little while yet and ye shall "see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power;" that is, after these days I shall not need to suffer any more, but, in my glorified body, shall show that I am not only a man, as you regard me, but also the almighty Son of God, who rules over all, and on the judgment day I shall come in the clouds of heaven and judge the quick and the dead.

Behold, now the high priest has heard the glorious, excellent confession which tells him what he should believe concerning this man, whom he and others had prepared themselves to entrap, and whom they were resolved on killing. Let us see what use the high priest makes of this confession. Matthew tells us that he "rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?"

In this, the first trial of our blessed Lord Jesus, which took place in the house of Caiaphas, He was declared a heretic and blasphemer. This gluts the high priestly maw; and now it only remains to have some worldly accusation brought against Christ before Pilate, so that His death might be decreed. While each one privately deliberates on

this, our innocent Lord Jesus is made to submit to their scorn; He must suffer them to spit in His holy face, and Himself to be buffeted, derided, smitten and mocked. For they regard such treatment altogether just, because Christ has been pronounced a heretic and blasphemer. They make a jest of His saying that He is the Christ. One strikes Him on this side, another on that. "Aha! You are the Christ, are you," they say, "then, pray, prophesy unto us, who is he that smote Thee?"

But let us diligently mark whether the Gospel does not fare in the same way to-day. The Papists question us, and desire to know our doctrine. And then, when we with the greatest simplicity and honesty confess our doctrine, as was done at Augsburg, at Ratisbon, and at imperial diets in other places, the mighty clamor rises: Heretics, heretics! All are busy then at heaping upon the poor Christians whatever ignominy, contempt, mockery and injury they can rally. They cry: It is Evangelical you are, is it? Is this your Gospel? Just wait, we will give you a little of the Gospel? And so they have gone to work and inflicted a most atrocious reproduction of the Passion-History upon the pious Christians of Germany, Italy, France and England.

It is, therefore, important that we carefully study this priestly *Processum Juris*. For then, in case we are brought before a similar tribunal, we can follow the example of our Lord Jesus, learning of Him patience, and deriving from Him true consolation. And, should we be compelled to suffer with Him for the sake of His Word, we can hope also to live with Him, and with Him to be lifted to glory. May God grant this to us all. Amen.

FIFTH PASSION-SERMON.

PETER THRICE DENIES THE LORD JESUS IN THE HOUSE OF CAIAPHAS.

MATT. 26, 69-75. Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

This is a useful narrative, for which reason it is related by each of the four Evangelists. It is useful chiefly in two respects. First, it teaches us to cherish humility and avoid presumption; for see how easily Peter, who would previously have gladly imperiled his body and his life for the Lord Jesus, is brought to such a terrible fall. And secondly, it teaches us how we may regain grace, after we have fallen into sin; for Peter furnishes us with a pleasing example of Christian repentance, showing what repentance really is, and how we must be freed from sin. But let us first relate the history.

When Jesus was taken captive in the garden and led away, first to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas, and from Annas to the high priest Caiaphas, John, as he himself writes, followed from afar and entered

the house of Caiaphas, in which he was acquainted, bringing Peter in with him. The latter sat down with the servants in the house and warmed himself at the fire. Then a damsel asked him whether he was a disciple of the captive Jesus. He vehemently denied that he was. The cock then crew for the first time. Upon this, as Matthew and Mark relate, Peter went away from the fire, out into the porch, where he was encountered in a similar way by a maid, who began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. Luke tells us that it was a man who said this of Peter. It needs merely be remembered here that, after the maid had begun to speak about Peter, the rest also expressed their opinions and chimed in with the maid. Peter then a second time denied. And finally, about the space of one hour after, as we are informed by Luke, he was met by one of the servants of the high priest, who, according to John, was a kinsman to him whose ear Peter cut off. He attacks Peter a little more severely than the rest, publicly saying that he had seen him in the garden with Jesus. Peter would not keep silent to this accusation, for he feared that it would endanger his life. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man, of whom ye speak. Now the Lord turns and casts upon Peter a look which so penetrates his soul, that he now perceives what he has done; and he goes out of Caiaphas' palace and weeps bitterly. This is about the whole of the occurrence in order, as related by the four Evangelists.

Here we should, in the first place, as stated in the beginning, learn from the example of pious Peter to recognize our weakness, so that we may refrain

from putting absolute confidence in other people or in ourselves. For our hearts are so entirely faint and fickle that they change every hour, as the Lord says in the 2. chapter of John. Who in the world would have expected such instability and feebleness in Peter! When the Lord, Luke 22., cautioned him, saying, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, how courageous was he not, how bold and undismayed! "Lord," said he, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." And when the Lord continued to admonish him, telling him not to be so foolhardy, and that before the cock would crow twice he should have denied Him thrice, we see that Peter thought it all a fable. He imagined this impossible, and intended to adhere to and defend the Lord at the risk of his own life. And his actions, indeed, show this to have been his intention. For in the hour of greatest peril, when the Jews were taking captive the Lord in the garden, Peter was the first to draw his sword, and he slashed into the mob, notwithstanding that he and only one other armed person opposed so many who were well equipped. Now who would have believed that one so valiant, who so faithfully stands by his Master, would so soon afterwards shamefully betray Him? In the garden no one attempted to hurt Peter and his fellow disciples, for the Lord's "Let these go" protected them. And especially here in the house of Caiaphas no one desires to injure them. But when, altogether incidentally, and perhaps through sympathy, the damsel that kept the door said unto Peter: "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" his courage failed him, and he feared that he would

have to share his Master's fate if he should answer yes, and, therefore, he denies that he is a disciple. And when he was accosted on this point the second time and the third, he began to curse and to swear, calling upon God to visit upon him His wrath if he had ever known or seen the man.

Let us pay due attention to the conduct of Peter, so that we may learn properly to know ourselves and other people, and to beware of presumptuousness. For if such a denial of faith can proceed from Peter, who, above all the other disciples, had a heart filled with loyalty and love for the Lord Jesus, yea, who was so enlightened by the grace of God that even Christ said unto him: "Blessed art thou, Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," and that He gave to him the name Cephas, "a stone," how much more easily can not such denial come from us poor mortals, who are much inferior to Peter in point of gifts, and, in all other respects, much more faint and frail? Be on thy guard, therefore; be not irreverently bold; think not that thou hast climbed the mountain and art out of danger; remember that thy flesh is totally corrupt! Neither doth Satan slumber, but walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whose heart he may trouble, and whom he may cast down or even devour. Therefore, be vigilant; live in the fear of God; build upon His grace alone, and in Him repose thy trust and confidence! And let that which Jesus spake in the garden to Peter, James and John, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation," be spoken also unto thee, that thou mayest neither snore nor be falsely secure, as though there

were no danger and no need for fear from henceforth, but that thou mayest watch and be sober, not doubting that thy arch-enemy is close at hand, yea, that thou bearest him in thy bosom! Thou wouldst, therefore, be lost, should God not stand by thee with His Holy Spirit. Thou canst neither govern nor restrain thyself one single hour. Therefore, say: I will pray God to give me His Holy Spirit, that He may rule and rightly lead me, and either ward off disturbance and temptation, or else graciously succor me and suffer me not to fall! This is the first point presented by our narrative. Under this head, however, appropriately comes the solemn admonition of the Lord, given in the 21. chapter of Luke: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness;" for we are just as ill-bred as the brute, which, when well fed, shows its insolence. He who has plenty and to spare, readily forgets God and His Word, or else cares very little for them; and then, before he knows it, he is entangled in the devil's net. Therefore, wouldst thou be out of danger, observe these three things: fear God, be watchful and sober, and pray without ceasing! For, although we must still feel temptation's thrusts, and sometimes fall because of weakness, God, through His Holy Spirit, will lift us up again, and not suffer us to remain victims of temptation.

In the second place, we find consolation in this narrative. Here we clearly see the fruit of our Lord Jesus' sufferings; and Peter's conduct plainly pictures to us not only the grace and mercy of God, but also the way in which grace may be regained by us when lost in unrighteousness and sin. Terri-

ble and heinous is the fall of Peter; as such he feels it most forcibly, and, therefore, he cannot longer bear to mingle with men, but steals away and weeps bitterly.

But here we find that the Lord not only foretold to him his fall, but afterwards also received him into favor without punishing him as his sin had deserved. For on Easter, before the Lord Jesus had shown Himself, the angel who was at the grave commanded the women to announce to His disciples, and to Peter especially, that the Lord had risen. And the Lord Himself, soon after He had appeared to Magdalene and the other women, appeared to Peter and comforted him. This all works together for our consolation, teaching us not to banish from our hearts confidence in God's grace, though we may have fallen, but, seeing how the Lord deals with Peter, to be assured that He has died on our account, and that His sufferings shall bring us consolation and assistance, although we are poor sinners. For if sinners are not to have the benefit of the sufferings of Christ, then would He have rejected His disciples, and particularly Peter, first of all, and nevermore have interested Himself for them, because they were all offended because of Him, fled from Him, and so shamefully denied Him. But the merciful Lord does not so; they are still His dear disciples, notwithstanding that they disgraced their calling. Let us mark this and apply it to our hearts for consolation; for thus will our gracious God also deal with us.

But, say you, what becomes of poor Judas? Do we not see him cut off from all grace? Although

we shall come to speak of this hereafter, it is still necessary for us, in this connection, to know what it was that furthered and preserved Peter, and what it was that subjected Judas to impediments and despair, so that Peter's case may teach us how to take care of ourselves and how to beware of that which befell Judas. Now we must make a distinction between Peter and Judas with reference to the heinousness of their crimes. For, while both transgress the will of God and subject themselves to everlasting condemnation, Judas' sin is greater than that of Peter. Judas surrenders to sin voluntarily and with premeditation, and, notwithstanding the Lord's frequent and fervent warnings, prefers his sins above Christ's love. This is not the case with Peter; his sin was accidental, not deliberate and malicious; his denial of Christ was the result of casual diffidence or weakness. Had he apprehended this result, he would not have entered the house of Caiaphas. Then, there is this further distinction between Peter and Judas, that the former, unlike the latter, is not the enemy of Christ and does not hate Him; that he does not run counter to the Lord, like the latter, with such wanton scorn, hatred and obstinacy that no exhortation to penitence and no favor of the Lord can influence him to repent; but that, before he considers and perceives what he is doing, through fear and weakness he is so overcome that he denies his dear Lord and begins to curse and to swear.

Let us mark well the aforementioned distinction in regard to sins, viz.: that, although both Peter and Judas do sin, and thus subject themselves to the judgment of God, the sin of Judas is more enormous

than the sin of Peter. For the Lord subsequently makes the difference between Pilate and the Jews, saying, Jno. 19., "He that hath delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." This is the reason why the conscience of Judas is more painfully wounded than Peter's, and his sufferings are more severe; the burden borne by Judas is by far the heavier and the more oppressive. Nevertheless, Peter's sin had deserved death, as well as that of Judas.

This distinction is justified also by St. Paul, who says of his persecuting Christ and His believers that he had done this in ignorance, and that, although his work of persecution was a damnable, mortal sin, it was still not at all to be compared with the persecutions carried on by the chief priests and Pharisees. This difference deserves to be diligently regarded, so that we may beware of such wanton and malicious sins as of a most grievous burden, and therefore watch that we do not obstinately persevere in impenitence. Now, although sins may be classified according to the degree of their criminality, and although no doubt exists that the greater the sin, the greater the consequent torment of conscience; still, when a man has obtained knowledge of his sins and is terrified by the wrath of God, he must not judge the measure of forgiveness and grace by the enormity or number of his sins. All sins, even the least, are so great and serious that we are not able to estimate their heinousness; yea, so great that we could not endure one of them, were it adequately seen and felt by us. Besides, Satan can so magnify a sin, though it be not the greatest, that the timid, fearful soul which is guilty of it supposes that no one else on earth

has ever committed so grievous a crime. Therefore, we must know and hold fast the Gospel doctrine of the grace and kindness of the Son of God; for this tells us that grace is mightier than all sin. It is the great object of God's Word and promises that no one may despond or despair on account of sin but that all may trust in the grace of God through His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus.

On this point Judas and Peter differ. Judas looks only at the enormity of his sins, falls into despair, thinks that all eternity can afford him neither counsel nor aid, and then the poor fellow goes and hangs himself. And why? Simply because he had despised God's Word and had not been bettered by it. When he now stood in need of consolation, but did not have the Word and desired not to turn to the Lord Jesus in faith, he was beyond all reach of help. Peter also wept bitterly, and feared and trembled on account of his sins, but he had more diligently heard and better remembered the Word of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, when he now finds himself in distress, he makes use of the Word, thinks of that which Christ has told him, clings to this, consoles himself with it, and hopes that God will be merciful to him. In such misery this is the true relief, which poor Judas lacked. But that this was really the course Peter took, and that he did abide by God's Word and grace, the Lord testifies in the 22. chapter of Luke, saying: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." While he was denying Christ, we do not see that there was a spark of faith in his heart; but afterwards, when his conscience was aroused and he was tortured by it, his faith returned, preserving to

him this Word of Christ, and preventing him from falling into despair.

Let us then learn here what true repentance is. Peter "wept bitterly." In this way repentance begins; the heart must truly perceive sin and be sincerely sorry for it, so that our delight in it, our love for it, and our living in it may cease. Our having disobeyed God's will and sinned, must be for us a source of heartfelt affliction.

Our might, however, cannot bring this about; but the Lord calls us to repent and makes His face to shine again upon us, just as He here calls and admonishes Peter by the crowing of the cock, of which He had told him before, and by turning and looking upon him. For we are by nature so disposed that we delight in sin and take pleasure in committing it continually. We see this in the case of Peter; for, after he had denied Christ once, he still keeps on until he has denied Him thrice, and cursed and sworn: "I do not know the man," being concerned about nothing. But when the cock crows and the Lord turns to look upon him, Peter immediately pauses and considers what he has done. Now, according to our nature and to the nature of sin, sin cannot help but terrify us, threaten us with God's wrath, and fill our hearts with anguish, as was the case with both Peter and Judas. Judas, when he perceived his sin, became so uneasy that he did not know what to do with himself. And Peter's agony was so great that it compelled him to flee from his fellow-men and give vent to his grief in tears, of which he could not shed enough.

When we feel such terror and anguish our best course is, first, to humble ourselves before God and freely confess our sins: O God, I am indeed a poor, miserable sinner, and, shouldst Thou depart from me with Thy grace, am able only to sin; and then, to abide God's Word and promises, adding: "But be merciful to me for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ!" When the soul thus seeks to console itself with God's Word, and sincerely trusts that God, for His Son's sake, will be merciful, then must the anguish abate and comfort surely follow. True and complete repentance, then, is this: to be terrified and humbled by sin, and to find comfort in the Lord Jesus and His sufferings through faith.

Thus, no doubt, Peter consoled himself with the word spoken to him by the Lord at the passover: "Satan hath desired to have you, but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," Luke 22. For, although his heart was filled with anxiety and sorrow, he did not despair like Judas. True, at first this consolation was as small as a grain of mustard-seed. But since the ground, on which this little consolation rested, was God's own Word and promises, it increased wonderfully, and when Peter met Christ again, on holy Easter-day, it had grown so great that all terrors and all doubts had fled, and nothing remained except heart-felt humility, with which to confess his weakness and cheerfully to acknowledge himself a sinner. Sin was not able to leave aught in Peter's heart except this weakness and this confession. This consolation, like a mighty deluge, suffocated, yea, quenched the fire that had threatened to consume his heart. Since, therefore, we cannot live without temptation, we should pre-

pare for it in time, and especially with diligence hear God's Word, and practice and remember it, so that consolation, like Peter's, may be ours in time of sorrow.

Thus we find that this example of St. Peter is given us for instruction and for consolation. We should learn from it, first, to flee false security and to live in the fear of God; for it is an easy matter even for great saints terribly to fall. But, secondly, we must also learn from this example to cling to God's Word, and to draw comfort from it, even when we have fallen, so that we may not, like Judas, despair on account of sin. For God does not wish any one to exalt himself on account of his endowments, for which reason we all should fear, watch and pray; neither does He, on the other hand, wish any one to be driven into despair by his sins. The Son of God became man and died upon the cross for the very purpose of banishing such evils. Therefore, if thou wouldst be a true Christian, fear God and confide in His grace and Word, and thou shalt always find consolation, deliverance and help. May our dear Father in Heaven, through His Holy Spirit, grant this to us all, for the sake of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SIXTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST IS DELIVERED TO PILATE.—JUDAS HANGS HIMSELF.—THE POTTER'S FIELD.

MATT. 27, 1-10 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: and when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

You have heard, my friends, how the Lord Jesus was first led to Annas, who then sent Him bound to Caiaphas, where the chief priests and scribes were assembled, and where these latter and the entire council sought false witness against Him, and finally falsely accused Him of blasphemy, for which, they said, He ought to die. We expect to speak further on this hereafter.

Next we find Him brought before Pilate; we shall see what happened there. But before we speak of this, we ought to know what was, after all, the reason why the chief spiritual and temporal rulers at Jerusalem were so highly incensed and

imbittered against the Lord that they flock together by night, make inquisition concerning Him at an unseasonable hour, and are in such uneasy haste to have Him destroyed, at the same time being unable to allege aught against Him except invented lies. It would be too lengthy, however, to relate all this now; each one can read it for himself in the history written by the four Evangelists, or learn it during the year from the preaching of the Word at Church. The Lord Jesus excuses neither the doctrine nor the life of these men, but censures both severely. Thus He calls them "an evil and adulterous generation," a "generation of vipers," and not the children of God, which they boast themselves to be, but "the children of the devil," because they can neither speak, teach, nor do that which is good. And shortly previous to this time, before He was taken, He gave them a final rebuke, calling down upon them, Matt. 23., the eight times uttered "woe!" And this it was that enkindled their hatred into such consuming flames, that lent cruelty to their enmity, and that made them so impetuous in the pursuit of their object, that Christ, being now in their power, had no opportunity to escape. Still, in order to give their savage, murderous hatred a plausible appearance, that is, to make it seem that their law fully authorized them to kill Christ, the high priest, as the Evangelists write, when he heard Christ say: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven," rent his clothes and said: "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?" And all the

others who were present said: "He is guilty of death." Soon after this they began to treat the dear Lord Jesus most miserably, not one among them having compassion on Him, but all of them enraged against Him like raving lions. The 22. and other Psalms tell us about this.

One thing, however, was still in their way. They knew very well that Pilate would care very little for that which they deemed sufficient cause for death; for He was a Gentile and had not received command of the Roman Emperor to execute the Jews because of their faith,—else he would have had to destroy all of them. For this reason they assembled when the morning was come, and, as Matthew writes, "took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death," that is, they considered what accusation they would bring against Him before Pilate. For they knew well enough that Pilate would not slay Christ on account of His having blasphemed in the judgment of the Jews. They found it necessary, therefore, to devise some specious, civil charge to be presented to Pilate, who was a temporal judge. For, by saying that Christ was a blasphemer, they could not have broken His neck.

Let us here see and learn how quick and venomous Satan is when men stand in need of advice how to kill Christ! The first word spoken by Pilate to Christ is his question: "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" This question clearly shows that, in this consultation of the Jews, they had agreed, as stated, to accuse the Lord Jesus before Pilate of desiring to excite sedition and to set Himself up for the king of the Jews. But what ground have they for such a charge? Where has Christ ever called Himself a

king? Where has He attempted to pass Himself off as a lord? If they had been willing they might, on the other hand, have testified how He refused, departed and hid Himself, when the people attempted to take Him by force to make Him a king. They might have told too that He had commanded them not to keep back from Cæsar that which belonged to him, but to render to him his due. Now, we must also consider that Pilate could hardly have been satisfied with bare accusations, but must certainly have demanded proofs. And how were these furnished? No doubt, as follows. They had heard Christ confess to the chief priest that He was the Christ. Then they took the evidence of the Scriptures, showing from the Prophets how Christ should be a king. For Zechariah says: "Behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation, &c.;" and Hosea, in his 3. chapter, "They shall seek David their king;" and many other passages express the same. Therefore, since the Lord acknowledges Himself to be the Christ, He thereby acknowledges Himself to be also the king of the Jews. Behold, how accurate the researches of the devil!

But concerning that which goes against them and might serve the Lord Jesus, they are silent. Where Zechariah says: "Behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation," he immediately adds, "lowly," that is, He shall be a spiritual King, who shall justify His own that believe in Him, and deliver them from death and all evil, that they might have consolation through Him against sin and God's wrath,—not a temporal king having business with money and possessions.

He implies that God has ordained other kings who should control nations and individuals and possess opulence and power; but that these kings should not impart righteousness and salvation, which gifts are brought and bestowed alone by this King, of whom the Prophet says, "Behold thy King cometh," &c. These villains do not mention a syllable of this, but the naked idea that Christ had made Himself the king of the Jews is what they dress up for Pilate's sight. Thus Pilate, who would not have assisted them had their charge not exceeded what it was at first, viz., heresy and blasphemy, was beguiled into participating in their work.

Just so it goes to-day; for civil governments, at any rate, usually have the fault that they care very little for the kingdom of God and for religion. When kings and princes enjoy allegiance, tribute and royal glory, they are careless about everything else, and thus are satisfied that Pilate's throne should be the only one before which Christ appears. But the chief priests and elders of the people, i. e., the blood-thirsty mob composed of Pope, cardinal, bishops, monks and priests, come and accuse Christ before Pilate; they instigate the temporal authorities, such as emperors, kings and princes against the Gospel, as the Jews incited Pilate against Christ, saying that it teaches insurrection and that, unless its influence is checked in time, every subject will become a rebel. They urge the authorities to oppose the Gospel with zeal, if they would not have prosperity and happiness to forsake their scepter. Yea, these bloody, papal asses preach to the princes that it is the Gospel's fault that the Turk assails us and that we are not more successful

in repelling him,—that the Gospel must be blamed for the great failures in our crops and for our being surrounded by misfortunes. By this means they arouse Pilate, who otherwise is not at all concerned about Christ and His preaching, to expose the Lord, and finally to command Him to be nailed to the cross.

Now, it cannot be helped that such falsehoods and virulent slander bring about painful results. But for this very reason have the Evangelists left us this history, so that, when like things come upon us, we may patiently bear them, saying, My Lord Jesus had to suffer the same. The servant is not better than his lord. Pilate would have permitted Christ to preach and perform miracles all His life, and would never have thought of interfering; but the high priests, the heartless horde, bring it to pass that Pilate as judge and Christ as criminal are brought together.

And so it is still; the Lord Jesus' greatest enemies are Pope, cardinal, bishops, monks and priests. When they have branded as heresy that which does not please them, or that which opposes them, they seek to hunt down the Gospel through worldly potentates; these latter must be their executioners and must, like Pilate, bedaub themselves with innocent blood, on the accusation and at the solicitation of these enemies. Pious Christian, bear it all! With thy Lord Jesus too they sported thus. Therefore, give thanks to God that thou art counted worthy to suffer for His name, as Luke tells us, in the 5. chapter of Acts, that the Apostles did! So much for the first part of our text.

The second part relates the terrible example of Judas. This the Evangelists so diligently portray that we may, as in a picture, recognize the peculiar character and nature of sin, and learn to shun it. For in Judas' case we see both how silently sin at first creeps in, but also how it afterwards causes such a horrible end.

We have heard, on a former occasion, what a seemingly small beginning this monstrous sin of Judas had, viz., that it began with his natural avarice and love of money. But its real fountain-head we find in Judas' being such a godless hypocrite and such a wicked, desperate despiser of God. Thus, when the opportunity to make money out of the Lord Jesus presented itself, he regarded it a trifling matter to betray his innocent Lord and Master. Besides, he thinks it quite a prize that he can so soon possess himself of such an amount of money. At the Last Supper the Lord admonishes Judas so pointedly and so often, that he could not have misunderstood Him. But let the Lord preach to him and warn him ever so faithfully, it is all in vain; Judas does not lose sight of his object; his heart is riveted to the thirty pieces of silver! What a faithful, stern and earnest warning was not that which the Lord Jesus gave him, saying: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me;" again: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born!" Should not Judas have taken these words to heart? Should he not have repented, saying: Great God, what have I not suffered the devil to put into my

soul, miserable fellow that I am! But he does nothing of the kind; on the contrary, when he is so faithfully warned, he even asks whether his intentions are known. He puts the question: "Master, is it I?" The Lord answers him: "Thou hast said," i. e., yes, thou art he. But this matter, as already said, gave him no care nor trouble, because it was the means by which he could obtain so much money.

This should be remembered; for if we wish a correct picture of sin it must be painted as seeming at first sight an indifferent, simple thing, which is not at all dangerous. In committing sin men do not concern themselves about God's wrath; they fear no misfortune and they regard sin not as a burden, but as a little feather which a breath can balance in the air or drive away. Therefore, when sin assails us we do not fear it; yea, we rejoice in it and love it, and we even think that the more we can sin in doing our work, the better our work shall be done. Suppose we illustrate this by the case of an avaricious usurer, an adulterer or a drunkard. Upon such Paul passes an appalling judgment, when he says, 1 Cor. 6: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor covetous, nor drunkards shall inherit the kingdom of God." This terrible decree is written here, is preached too, and the very ones who are subject to such vices get to hear it; but they accept it no more than Judas accepted it. Could they only dispose of their property so as to make it yield them twenty or thirty per cent; could only their evil desires be satisfied; could they only have gay companions every day and be jolly and drunk every

night,—then would they think themselves very fortunate and, neither caring for nor grieving over the judgment pronounced upon them, be in good spirits and perfectly merry.

This is spoken for the common people who grossly tread in Judas' footsteps. But exceedingly dreadful it is that to-day the Pope and his minions persecute and condemn God's Word, the acknowledged truth, invent many base and blasphemous lies against this Word, and induce worldly potentates to use their power against it and to exterminate the truth of God and all who hold it, so that Judas' trade may be made to flourish as formerly. And then they are so utterly blind and obdurate that their conscience does not trouble them, and that they think it would be an excellent thing to overflow this land with blood. What blindness,—what diabolical enmity against Christ's Word and the true Church! But more of this hereafter.

Adam preached the same thing to Cain, his son, and warned him against sin, when he perceived what hatred there was in his heart toward his brother Abel. He says to him, Gen. 4: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." By this he meant to say: Make thyself well acquainted with sin; for when it attacks a man it always is as a wild, rapacious beast, which pretends to be asleep and lets men handle and stroke it; no one fears and no one is hurt. Even as innocent as this does sin seem. It is a smooth, pretty kitten, which permits itself to be played with and caressed. But be careful, saith Adam; it sleeps, indeed, but will not

sleep forever. Why not? Because it "lieth at the door," in a public place, where every one comes and goes; nothing easier, therefore, than that it should awake. And then it will be a furious lion, an angry bear, tearing to pieces and destroying all in its way. Now, as Adam had foretold to Cain, so it came. Adam commanded him to conquer sin, and not let sin rule and lead him. But Cain gave no heed; he let sin have its own way; he slew his brother. Sin did not rest long here; its sleep was soon over, and then it tortured Cain until he did not know where to stay. He dared not remain with his father and mother, and besides, had fears for his body and his life.

Let us mark well this second characteristic of sin! At first it sleeps and seems a trifling, harmless thing. But it sleeps not long, and when it awakes it becomes a grievous burden which we cannot bear without God's special help. This we see in the case of the traitor Judas. While sin rested, it was impossible for him to fear; the glossy fur deceived him so, that he did not perceive the sharp, poisonous claws. But its rest could not last a great while, for it lay at the door where it could be easily waked. Where all pleading and all admonition failed before, now a single moment comes and drives such terror to his soul that he knows not what to do. For when he sees the Lord led to Pilate he fears that the Lord's life is imperiled, is sorry, and now perceives, for the first time, what he has done. Now sin awakes and, according to its natural way, acts with such fury and horror that he cannot bear it. Before, he so loved the thirty pieces of silver that, for the sake of having them, he could betray and

sell the Lord Jesus without a pang; now, the matter stands reversed. If he now had the money and wealth of all the world, he would give it all to save the Lord Jesus' life. Since it was love of money that made him so miserable, and his purpose to possess it that brought this sin upon him, he now hates money so, that he has neither rest nor peace in its possession, but runs after the high priests into the temple, confesses that he has done wrong, and offers to give them back the money if they will only liberate Jesus. And when the chief priests will not do this, to get rid of the money at all events he casts it down at their feet. Now, this is the peculiar character of sin; when it awakes it so violently attacks conscience and preaches a sermon of such horrors that the frightened heart knows not what to do and what not to do. And sin inflicts the further calamity, that, as little as is the consolation which the poor creature finds in himself, so little too is the comfort he derives from others. Judas honestly tells the chief priests his troubles. Alas, he says, "I have sinned,—I have betrayed the innocent blood!" But how do they console him? "What is that to us? see thou to that," they tell him. They shove everything over to the shoulders of Judas, and let the intolerable load lie there, unwilling in the least to help the poor, frightened soul with words of consolation or of counsel.

Now follows the third and last calamity. For when it so happens that sin persists in castigating conscience, the devil does not loiter, but pokes and blows the fire until the red flames rage within, and all attempts at rescue seem vain. In such fear and agony Judas is urged on by Satan until he

goes out quickly, and in his misery hangs himself. Now, this is the end which Satan from the beginning sought to bring about by sin. He who could, at the beginning, consider and credit this end, would surely pray and guard against it. But it is hidden; sin is very quiet, and does not disclose in the start what its final object is. So much for the history of poor, unhappy Judas, who for a trifle sold the Lord Jesus, and who not only did not enjoy this money, but also lost on its account body, life, soul and salvation.

Therefore, study well this example, and let its memory nevermore depart; for it is to help me and you and all of us to an accurate knowledge of sin, and to serve us as a shield against it. If we do not mark this example and learn from it to know sin, we are liable to be deceived by sin and are exposed to the damage which it does. For, in the first place, it is the nature of sin so to flatter and please the old Adam that he delights in it and loves it; but this lasts only until sin awakes. Then, in the second place, follow trouble, toil, fear, danger, terrors, tremblings, despair and, finally, eternal death. Let us recognize these two features of sin from the case of Judas, and not suffer ourselves to be deluded like the world, which accepts neither instruction nor reproof, being deceived by sin's beautiful, fair and cheerful countenance! Many a citizen, peasant and nobleman knows how to make an easy living. If he has anything for sale, he tries to get the highest price. When he buys, he tries to buy as cheap as possible. He is not content with what his houses have brought him hitherto, but raises the rent. And When he disposes of money, wheat or

other commodities, he has an eye to his best interests. Such a course soothes and pleases our Adam's nature. Every one thinks his shrewdness to have been admirable when he, by some means or other, has obtained and laid by in one year, say one, two or three hundred dollars, according to the nature of his business. Hence we see every one pursuing his daily bread, and this with all manner of haste.

This is the very sin of which Judas was guilty in the beginning of his career. The world to-day does just as Judas did; it does not fear this sin and thinks there is no danger in it. But why? Simply because sin rests and sleeps and rarely shows its nature in the start. Sin paints and adorns itself; it puts on the mask of beauty and of youth; in this way it hides its hideousness. But if we could at once unmask it and wash off its paint with strong lye, we would run away from it as from the devil. No one would consent to extortion and addict himself to avarice, if he knew what the consequence will be when sin begins to rack the conscience and when remorse comes. For the numerous examples which we have, prove that people who pursue only money and possessions, cannot in the last hour abandon their accustomed course of thought. In that hour their hearts are closed to all consolation from God's Word, for their thoughts are even then rambling through the counting-room, the market and the warehouse, and engaged with this or that debt not yet collected. In short, thorns have so enclosed them that they cannot flee; or else their consciences are so molested as to make them totally unfit for taking comfort.

What has been said applies not only to the bag of Judas, i. e., avarice, but to all sins. For, no matter where it sleeps, sin finally must awake, and it always then creates such wretchedness as was that of Judas. Still, this is done especially in the true disciples of Judas, who, for the sake of money and possessions, oppose the Word of God, persecute the Gospel, and give occasion for false doctrine and idolatry. Such disciples are the Pope, his cardinals, bishops, worthless lords, priests, monks, doctors and the like, who crowd around Judas' bag and fight for it. No wonder, for this bag is not prickly and thorny, but its touch is very soft and velvety; in other words, the world loudly applauds those who have succeeded in securing sufficient means for living at ease and in splendor. Besides, it seems a trifle to violate the Word of God in this respect or that, thus sinning against the acknowledged truth, and to act contrary to one's convictions; yea, it seems an easy thing for the prebendary who occupies the cathedral, and for the minister who moderates himself, to justify their unwillingness to speak the truth openly. For the world and the devil pay big wages for such work. But when sin awakes, the little, black, rabid dog, Remorse, will surely come, and touch and terrify thy conscience so, that thou shalt find consolation nowhere, and thus be hurled into despair by the machinations of the devil. Then shalt thou have received the same reward with Judas.

It were well, therefore, to consider this danger in time, to forego bishoprics, canonries, Epicureanism and the like, to resolve to be a Christian, to further and confess God's Word, and to walk before God

with a clear conscience. Even if we had no superabundance of bread, God would still give us our daily bread and not suffer us to starve, for He says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The following, therefore, is what this history teaches. Since sin, at first, is quiet and sleeps, but afterward awakes and fills conscience with all misery, by which Satan then drives his victims into despair, we should beware of sin, do nothing against our better knowledge and, besides, ask God daily, yea, every moment, for His Holy Spirit, that He may not lead us into temptation, but mercifully save us from falling and shield us from sin. It has already been stated that we are not apprehensive of the evil results of sin, because sin is not awake in the beginning, but sleeps, and that deception and ruin, therefore, are very near us. For this reason we ought to pray without ceasing, and be very careful everywhere, so that sin may not steal upon us unawares.

But when the fall has occurred and we have been deceived, and when sin, which slept at first, now awakes, appears to us and upbraids us, we must be prepared for this encounter, and from the example of Judas we can learn how to be prepared. For how clearly do we not see what was the matter with Judas! Satan converted his sin into a mountain so huge and lofty that it shut out from his sight God, together with His Word, His promises and His mercy; hence, he simply despairs. Now, when we trace this confusion back to its origin, can we deny that Judas could have consoled himself even in such great distress, had he not set at naught God's

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Word, but more eagerly studied and obeyed it? Having always despised and neglected the Word, is it to be wondered at that now, when he stands in need of its comfort and aid he must do without them? Therefore, as we must, on the one hand, guard ourselves, with godliness and constant prayer, against sleeping sin, so that we may not be deceived and seduced; so also, on the other hand, when sin awakes, and chastises and disturbs us, we must defend and support ourselves with the Holy Gospel. This Gospel shows us Christ as Him who suffered and made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. And in this Gospel we find that God, the Almighty Creator and Father, desires not the death of a sinner; but that He does desire the sinner to return and live, that is, to acknowledge and lament his sins and to hope for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus. But Judas had not these Gospel gifts; hence he despaired.

Again, Peter also fell shamefully, and experienced such pangs as those of Judas. Sin slept at first; in other words, his denying Christ did not seem specially dangerous to Peter; but it finally awakes and so torments his heart that he cannot sufficiently bewail his fall, or, as the Evangelists have it, "He went out and wept bitterly." But why is it that Peter does not hang himself like Judas? Simply because Peter, no doubt, remembered the Word of the Lord Jesus; this saved him. He must have remembered that the Lord had prophesied to him that he should fall, and also that He had comforted him, saying, as we read Luke 22., "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee,

that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

This sermon Peter heard and kept. This Word was the staff that supported him; sin could not now crush him to earth; had it been otherwise, sin would have done with him as it did with Judas. God's Word saved him. O, learn this well, and thus be prepared for like emergencies; hear God's Word frequently; never go to bed and never rise from sleep without repeating one, two, three or four of its beautiful passages!

Christ says, Matt. 9: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Matt. 11: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Jno. 3: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned." Again, Jno. 3: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him." Jno. 5: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." Jno. 11: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth

on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” 1 Jno. 2: “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” If we daily practice such and similar passages, and by practicing familiarize ourselves with them, we then possess the infallible remedy for all spiritual ailments. But unhappy Judas had not this remedy at hand.

We have more such examples. Dreadful was the fall of David; his was a more heinous sin than were the sins which king Saul committed in the beginning of his apostasy. How, then, are we to account for it that Saul cuts his throat, while David finds deliverance? Saul had not God’s Word; therefore, when sin raged and reproached him, he could not defend himself; for he had nothing on which to lay hold. Sin, when it awaked, reproached David also, and with such severity that he himself pronounced his judgment, saying, that he had deserved to die. But in this time of need he holds to the word of the prophet Nathan, who tells him that God is gracious, and that He will not impute to him his sin. Let us, then, learn well this second lesson taught us here, viz., not only to shun sin, but also, when sin awakes, to be able to contend with it and to protect ourselves. But during our whole life we must prepare for such distress, equipping ourselves with the Word of God, else we shall have no aid nor counsel, as Judas’ case shows plainly. How Judas rejoiced at first over the thirty pieces of silver! They were in his sight as a meadow mown, for sin rested not. But when sin

awoke, these thirty pieces of silver became a burden which he could not bear, and so, to relieve his conscience of this load, he hanged himself. All he effected by this means, however, was, that he had to bear the burden in eternity. Of such an end beware; do not let sin creep in; live in the fear of God; keep conscience clear, and attentively hear God's Word: then consolation shall be thine in need of every kind!

The Evangelists further relate that the chief priests took counsel about the thirty pieces of silver. They would not put them into the treasury, but bought with them the potter's field, of which they made a burial-place for strangers. The prophecy, of which this was the fulfillment, does not appear remarkable. However, since the Evangelist takes the pains to quote that which the prophet Zechariah had predicted long before, the prophecy cannot be meaningless, but must have its peculiar signification. The following is, no doubt, its proper explanation.

The citizens of Jerusalem had their cemeteries, while strangers, as we see here, had none. Now, in the true Jerusalem, the Christian Church, we find that the Jews, according to the 147. Psalm, are God's people: "He showeth His Word unto Jacob." But to us Gentiles, who are strangers, the kingdom of God does not belong; for the same Psalm continues to sing: "He hath not dealt so with any nation," &c. But the thirty pieces of silver, for which our dear Lord Jesus was sold, have bought a burial-place for us pilgrims too; that is, the innocent sufferings and death of Christ have blessed us Gentiles also with the hope of everlasting life. For

the Lord had to bleed and die in consequence of being sold for thirty pieces of silver. Therefore, the Evangelist teaches us from the Prophets that we should not forget for whom the Lord was sold, for whom He suffered, and for whom He died. It was not alone for His people, to whom He had been promised, but also for us Gentiles, who before had no final resting-place in the true Jerusalem. Those thirty pieces of silver, which Judas received for Christ, have bought us a share in the acre of our God. Now we shall be laid into that glorious grave, bed-chamber magnificent, from which our Lord Jesus will call us forth on the judgment-day, when He shall also give us everlasting joy. May our dear Father in heaven grant us this through *His Holy Spirit*. Amen.

SEVENTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST ACCUSED BEFORE PILATE AND CONDEMNED TO DEATH.

MATT. 27, 11-31. And Jesus stood before the governor : and the governor asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? And He answered him to never a word ; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man : for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person : see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them : and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand ; and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews ! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

In a recent sermon you heard, dear friends, how the Lord Jesus was tried before the chief priest. We are now ready to learn what happened Him after He was delivered to Pilate. Each Evangelist has his own way of relating these things and does not go into all the details, but one states this, another that, for which reason it is necessary to compile the items stated by each, and then to relate these items in their historical order.

The first item is furnished by the Evangelist John, who says that when, early in the morning, they led Jesus from the palace of Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment, they themselves went not in, lest they should be defiled and become disqualified to eat the passover. Since they were required to separate themselves from those as unclean who accidentally entered a house in which some one had died, they concluded that it might defile them to go into the judgment hall, in which the sentence of death was pronounced. It did not occur to these blind people that it was a far greater sin to shed innocent blood. Such holiness prevails among our Papists too, who think that eating flesh on Friday or eggs in the passion-week is a much greater sin than to persecute and strangle poor Christians for the Gospel's sake. They go about the latter with hearts as light as though it were a trifle. But about the former, which is no sin at all, but merely a human prohibition, they are exceedingly conscientious. Since these holy people refuse to go into the hall of judgment, Pilate was constrained to go out to them. He asked them: "What accusation bring ye against this man?" Impudently and

with arrogance they reply: "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee." Just as if they were so upright and pious that we should not suppose them capable of undertaking anything wrong! But Pilate meets them nobly when he says: "Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law." This was as much as saying: It is not customary with us Romans to judge a man without first trying him; but if you Jews think it is right to do so, why, you may take and kill Him, but I will not. Thus we clearly see that the Jews, after they had taken all necessary counsel, still have no confidence in themselves; they fear that their accusation will not stand the test. Nevertheless, they are unwilling to accept Pilate's decision without a reply, for it stung them to the quick, and therefore they answer: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." This meant: If we had the authority to do this, we should not have called on you; but the Emperor has taken criminal jurisdiction away from us and confided it to you; therefore, act according to your office.

John adds here: "That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spake, signifying what death He should die." For, as we read Matthew 20. and Luke 17., Christ had foretold to His disciples that He should be delivered to the Gentiles. For the sake, however, of having a charge to make, they accused Him, as Luke writes, in these words: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a king." Here we hear why they delivered Him to Pilate. But the account suffi-

ciently shows how basely they belie our dear Lord. Christ could, indeed, have strongly confuted them by referring them to His words: "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's;" but what good would it have done? He had to suffer Himself to be accused of being a rebel, of turning the nation away from the Emperor, of forbidding the paying of tribute, and of desiring to be a king.

Just so, at this day, the Pope, cardinals, bishops, monks and priests calumniate the holy Gospel, charging it with teaching sedition, and saying that unless it is opposed the temporal power will come into disrepute and no one will respect it. But let this not offend thee; thank God that thou knowest that they, the desperate miscreants, most invidious foes of the Lord Jesus and most malignant blasphemers of Christ's Gospel, lie! For the Gospel deals with other and loftier things: it teaches how we can be freed from sin and attain to eternal life, alone by believing in the Son of God. This is the character of the instructions given us by the Gospel; it does not meddle with worldly things, leaves these so to remain as God has already disposed of them by means of the temporal government, and exhorts to obedience to this government.

When Pilate now had heard the accusation, he was in no haste to act upon it, but, as John says, entered into the judgment hall again, ordered Jesus to be brought before him and asked Him, saying: "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered him: "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" As though He would say: O, if my enemies would acquit me, you would

soon do so too; for I know that you do not regard me as a king nor as one who would be likely to make an uproar.

“Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me; what hast Thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto Him, what is truth?” As if he would say: If Thou art a king sent to bear witness unto the truth, we have no reason to fear Thee; for, with this as Thy object, Thou wilt not injure the Emperor. The proud Gentile meant to say, in other words: Truth is not the cause of a great deal of strife. And this is only too true, and especially in these evil and latter days does truth go begging. It is deceitfulness, fraud, avarice, usury and the like that elevate a man in these times. But what is gained by these in the end will soon be seen.

When Pilate had sufficiently examined the Lord, he went out again unto the Jews and said: “I find in Him no fault at all,”—“I have found no fault in this man.” But the Jews, as Luke relates, “were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And

as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. And Herod with his men of war set Him at naught, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves."

Here some might wonder why the Lord converses so with Pilate, giving him all information, but refuses to speak one word with Herod, who, besides, was king of Galilee. The true reason for this we find in Herod's being a totally abandoned scoundrel and, at the same time, a great hypocrite. He had lately caused John the Baptist to be beheaded, and lived a life of public scandal by having his brother Philip's wife, and still pretended to be exceedingly pious. For this reason the Lord, in the Gospel, calls him a fox,—an animal of which the fur is the only valuable part,—a ravenous, but still a very cunning animal. Such people are not worthy of intercourse with others; they are hypocrites who adopt holy faces and gentle speech, as it is written of Herod in Mark 6., where it says that he "feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy; . . . and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." But such people are not

in earnest. Scoffers they are, who regard the Gospel as a fable, and who look upon the Christian as a great fool for offending great lords and endangering his possessions by his faith. Let every one, therefore, avoid such people, and do as Christ here did with Herod, have no communication with them.

This also is worthy of observation here that just as Pilate and Herod, who before were enemies, now become friends by their contact with Christ the Lord, even so do we see men act in our day. Men who could not be reconciled among themselves before, are harmonious in their opposition to the Gospel. One bishop cannot agree with another, and one order cannot be friendly toward another order. Princes are dissatisfied with each other. Each one wishes to be the best, to have the preference, and to oppress and silence all the rest. But when Christ comes among them and His Gospel shows its might, they all unite, are the best friends in the world, and stand together with their goods and lives, as David prophesied long ago in the 2. Psalm.

After the Lord was brought again from Herod to Pilate, "Pilate," so says Luke, "when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him; no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)"

"And they had then," says Matthew, as we have heard, "a notable prisoner, called Barabbas." Him Pilate places before the Jews, together with Christ, that the Jews might choose between the two, hoping that no one would ask for Barabbas, as he was a great rebel and murderer, well worthy of death.

"But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas." "And," so Luke proceeds, "they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man and release unto us Barabbas; (who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him; I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified."

Matthew writes that when Pilate "was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

And this was, indeed, an excellent warning, sent perhaps by some good angel, who, in a dream, announced to Pilate's wife the misfortunes and calamities which Pilate would bring upon himself and his house in case he should listen to the Jews and, at their command, destroy the innocent Jesus. But as admonitions were useless and vain in Judas' case, so did they at last avail nothing with Pilate. Nevertheless, he resists the Jews for a while. The

Jews, to whom Christ was promised, wish the most villainous murderer to live, but Him, the Prince of life, they are in haste to slay. Since in this way Pilate's proposition to "let Him go" is discouraged, Pilate makes still another effort: he takes Jesus and scourges Him, as the Evangelists continue to relate.

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him," "and scourged Him," "and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand" instead of a scepter; "and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him," "and began to salute Him," "saying, Hail, King of the Jews!" and smote Him in the face. "And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head," "and bowing their knees worshipped Him."

Here and throughout the entire Passion-history you will observe, dear Christian, how Satan poured out all his poisonous, bitter, hellish hatred, rage and fury upon our dear Lord in such a way that surely no human being ever has endured such great and dreadful suffering, torture, insult, abuse and derision as the Son of God; and this He bore for the sake of my sin, thy sin and the sin of all the world. But now, since the suffering and death of Christ are the only sacrifice that was able to expiate sin, it is easy to calculate how immensely great and terrible God's wrath against sin must be; and also, how ineffably, yea, unfathomably great must be His grace and mercy toward us condemned beings,—

that grace and mercy whereby He gave His only begotten Son to die an ignominious death upon the cross for our sins.

Now it was customary among the Romans to beat malefactors before executing them; for which reason Pilate commanded Christ also to be scourged. At the same time he still hopes and labors to liberate the Lord. Therefore he led Jesus forth, after the soldiers had scourged Him and put on Him the purple robe and the crown of thorns, and said to the Jews: "Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him."

"Then," says John, "came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!" meaning by this: You should be satisfied with such punishment as this, seeing that your accusations are so groundless and His innocence is so evident. But neither did he succeed in this way.

As soon as the chief priests and their officers saw Jesus, and perceived that Pilate still sought to acquit Him, "they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him." Pilate was displeased with such great injustice, "for," as we are informed by Matthew, "he knew that for envy they had delivered Him." Therefore he answers them bluntly: "Take ye Him and crucify Him; for I find no fault in Him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then

saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

And this was also a powerful warning. For Pilate here went too far, thinking that in virtue of his authority Jesus' fate was in his hands, to be decided for or against Him at his own pleasure, as temporal authorities in such pride commit many sins. No, Pilate, says Christ, you overdo this matter; keep within proper bounds. If you have power, you have it not of yourself; power comes from above. Therefore, use your power in such a manner that you may know how to give an account of its exercise. Pilate accepts this admonition, and seeks the more how he might release Him. But the Jews would not hear of such a thing and "cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar."

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour," i. e., about noon. "And he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!" in other words, You still maintain that He had made Himself a king. Alas, for the king! You do Him great injustice. Does He look like a king or like a seditious person? But all was vain; "They cried out, Away with Him, away with

Him, crucify Him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar."

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made," he was "willing to content the people" and "gave sentence that it should be as they required," and "took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children;" that is, if we do Him wrong, then may we and our children be punished for it. "Then released he Barabbas unto them,"—"him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus," mocked and scourged, "to their will," "to be crucified." These are the things that happened the Lord Jesus before Pilate.

EIGHTH PASSION-SERMON.

EXPLANATION OF SEVERAL POINTS IN THE HISTORY JUST GIVEN.

This part of the history of our Lord Jesus furnishes us with many excellent points of Christian doctrine, laden with consolation. Since, however, the material presented here is too much for one sermon, and the narrative itself is sufficiently lengthy, we shall dwell only on three points. The first is this: Pilate and others frequently testify to the innocence of our dear Lord Jesus. The second: Christ witnessed a good confession before Pilate,—which is also highly extolled by St. Paul, 1 Tim. 6. The third: Both Pilate and the Jews treat the blood of the Lord as a trifle, but it afterward becomes an intolerable and everlasting burden, which sinks them into temporal and eternal misery.

With reference to the first point, you must have noticed throughout that Pilate always insists upon it that he finds no cause of death in Christ. His wife also sent unto him, telling him to have nothing to do with that just and innocent man. Pilate moreover discovers, from all the actions of the Jews and by diligent investigation, that the chief priests and elders were moved against Christ by nothing but malice and envy. Similar testimony, but in greater measure and more powerful, was borne after the death of Christ. Great and glorious miracles then were wrought. The sun lost his lustre and

deep darkness reigned, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the earth did quake, the rocks rent, the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints arose. Then the centurion openly confessed: "Certainly this was a righteous man." And all the people present, beholding and taking to heart the things which were done, smote their breasts, to signify that the rash execution of the dear, innocent Lord gave them pain.

But of what use is this testimony? Why do the Evangelists so carefully relate it? Without a doubt, their only object is to point us to the counsel and will of God, and to admonish us to consider why the Lord, being innocent and just, had to suffer so. In other words, they wish, in view of the abundant proof that Christ was innocent and did not deserve to die, to make us firmer in our faith. They desire to convince us that whatever our blessed Lord Jesus suffered, He suffered for us; and that God laid these afflictions upon Him, and, although He was innocent, would not remove them, so that, by His bearing them, sin might be removed from us and we might be reconciled again to God.

Whenever, therefore, we read in any part of the Passion history how unjustly the Jews and Gentiles treated the Lord Jesus, how they smote Him before the high priest, set Him at naught before Herod, and mocked and scourged Him in the judgment hall,—whenever, I say, we hear of such treatment, no matter where it is recorded, our thoughts must run thus: Behold, He is innocent; He does not bear this for Himself; He has not merited this. But I and you and all of us have deserved this suffering; death and every misfortune did rest upon

us because of sin; but here the innocent and holy Son of God appears, takes upon Himself my debts, thy debts, and the debts of all of us, and discharges them, so that we might be free. When these are our thoughts we shall have such comfort that our hearts cannot despair on account of their sin, and that we shall not flee from God as though He were a tyrant or an executioner; but that we shall turn unto Him with heart-felt confidence and praise and glorify His mercy, which, as Paul says in the 5. chap. of Romans, He commendeth toward us in that He delivered His only begotten Son, our Lord and Saviour, unto death, to die for us sinners. Who could or would doubt that God's intentions toward us are good and altogether gracious?

Sin had subjected all of us to the wrath of God and to death, and had transferred us into Satan's kingdom; eternal life was lost, and in its place had been inherited every calamity for time and for eternity. But our Father, merciful and gracious, comes to our relief, and, rather than permit us to remain in such misery, sends His only begotten Son, born of a virgin and made under the law, so that the law, although flesh and blood were unable to do God's will, might not have been given in vain, but might be fulfilled by this Man for all other men. And finally God suffers Him to die upon the cross, by His innocent death to atone for our sins, so that we, being released from eternal death and from the kingdom of Satan, might receive eternal life and be the children of God.

Believing that this was done on thy account and for thy welfare, take it as thine own and let it comfort thee. And well may we do this; for here

we hear not once, not twice, but many times, that all that Jesus suffers He suffers innocently. But why does God tolerate this, yea, why does He ordain and bring it about? Simply that thou mightest be comforted in Christ. He does not suffer for Himself, but for thee and for all mankind, even as John says: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." For this reason John the Baptist calls Him "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," that is, a divinely appointed Sacrifice, who takes the sin of all the world upon Himself, so that this sin may rest upon the world no longer. This accounts for the seeming inconsistency. He is the Son of God, perfectly holy and altogether without sin, and therefore it were but just that He should not be subject to the curse and to death. We are sinners and under the curse and wrath of God, and therefore it were but just that we should suffer death and damnation. But God has reversed this relation; He who knows no sin, who is altogether merciful, and in whom, as John says, dwells the fullness of God's grace, was made a curse for us and had to bear sin's punishment, while we, through Him, have obtained mercy and have become the children of God. We should, therefore, cling to this consolation and take special delight in such testimony for Christ's innocence. For what Christ innocently suffered was caused by our sins. Therefore His innocence comforts us against all sin and suffering; for His innocence is a sure and lasting evidence that His passion is for our benefit, and that our dear Lord and merciful Redeemer has suffered for us and paid our debts.

However, since we shall have occasion to speak further of this when we come to Christ's crucifixion between the murderers, we shall now proceed to the second point.

St. Paul, 1 Tim. 6., admonishes Timothy thus: "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment," that is, doctrine, "without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Because this passage mentions so directly the confession which our dear Lord Jesus made before Pilate, and Paul makes use of it for earnestly admonishing Timothy, we have reason to meditate upon this confession and to inquire what it is and what is its purpose. Now, the Gospels tell us plainly what it was that Christ confessed. When the Jews had accused Him of having said that He was a king, and Pilate had taken Him to task on this account, He did not deny, but confessed openly before Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world," i. e., my kingdom is no corporeal, earthly kingdom. Then Pilate asked again, "Art Thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Do you ask: But of what use was this confession to Paul in admonishing Timothy to keep the commandment, i. e. doctrine, pure and not to adulterate it? Truly, of much use! Everything, if we desire to be true ministers and Christians, depends upon our believing what Christ confessed,

viz.: that He is a king; but that His kingdom is not of this world; that His only work in this world is to bear witness unto the truth. And it follows that His earthly subjects must be like Him, the King. He is indeed called a king; but when He is compared with Herod, Pilate and other temporal kings and rulers, he seems a poor, wretched man. Herod was a great, shining lord, who courted sensual delight, realized his heart's desires, and was looked upon by all the world as glorious. So the world regarded Pilate too and others. But poor, innocent Christ bears no comparison with such as they; yea, men mock and scorn Him as they please; they nail Him to the cross and murder Him. Therefore He said: "My kingdom is not of this world!"

Why, then, is He called a king? Because He is a king,—a king "just, and having salvation," as Zechariah says, chapter 9. Therefore, whosoever lives in His kingdom must not expect Him to give money or possessions, to satisfy the body's wants, or to do the other things which earthly kings are wont to do. No, this King forgives sins; He bestows righteousness; He delivers from everlasting death; He bestows the Holy Spirit and eternal life. These are His gifts to all who hear His voice. This kingdom He has established on earth, but only in the Word and in faith.

We have, therefore, an eternal King omnipotent, Christ Jesus, God's own Son, who rescues us from Satan's power, from sin, from never-ending death. Our King does not deliver from bodily death; for earth is the place for suffering and dying, and He

Himself had to suffer here and die. Those who recognize this character of the King and His kingdom bear the cross with resignation. For then they know that our Lord Jesus, the everlasting King, also had to bear the cross, and thus, remembering that the servant cannot fare better than his master, are made willing and ready to suffer. And, besides, they take comfort in the knowledge that, although they must suffer here, there in eternity joy and glory shall be theirs. It is this that makes Christians bold, even in the midst of temptation and death; while they who do not know these things cannot do otherwise in days of adversity than mourn, lament, murmur, show impatience, and, in the end, even-despair. For the latter think that if God wished them well, He would not permit so much misery to come upon them, or else would soon help and rescue them. Such thoughts unmistakably prove that Christ is held to be a king of this world. Temporal kings must, according to the duties of their office, protect the bodies, lives and possessions of their subjects and defend them against danger. But Christ, the King of glory, permits body and property, life and all to be in danger.

Do thou learn and firmly believe that these things are so for the reason, simply, that His "Kingdom is not of this world." Thy Christian faith is not to be used by thee on earth as the means for obtaining all things in abundance, or for supplying all thy desires. For behold thy King! How does it fare with Him, the Lord Jesus? With what does He make a display? Did He live a life of ease? Do men regard Him as glorious? We see nothing

there except the suffering, mocked, reviled and ignominiously slaughtered One.

True, He does sway a scepter, but only over a very small number, even the testimony of truth, that is, the holy Gospel. By means of this, as said already, He sends the Holy Spirit into the souls of men, forgives their sins, and gives them the hope of everlasting life. But all these things take place only in faith and in the Word; we cannot see them; we cannot touch them; they are realized not by reason, but by hope. However, when earth's kingdom ends and we dwell no longer here, then shall His kingdom and His glory be revealed to us, yea, we shall live with Him and with Him rule all things in heaven and on earth.

It was in this way that the Lord was recognized on the cross by one of the malefactors, saying, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." He saw Christ suspended on the tree in the same misery, in which he found himself. The malefactor on the left was offended at Christ's helplessness and helped the Jews to rail on Him: Ah! a very fine king, indeed! He concluded that since the dear Lord was so wretched and poor on earth, it would, of course, be useless to expect help from Him. But he on the right knew Him well; he knew Him not as a worldly, but as a spiritual and an eternal King. For this reason he prays that He would remember him in His kingdom when His body should be lifeless there upon the cross. In this way must we also believe in Him, and then shall we find immutable comfort in Christ Jesus.

Now, all Christians need that consolation which always, in all kinds of distress and disappointment,

comes to them when they hold to Christ's confession before Pilate. It makes them say to themselves: Why shouldest thou weep? Why complain of this or that misfortune? Think what kind of a King thou hast; what says He before Pilate? "My kingdom is not of this world." Wouldst thou have thy kingdom here? No, no; for here it would not last; this is altogether the land of suffering! But in the world to come glory and a joyful life shall surely be found. If they could be found here, they would afford only a short and transient joy, for in this world there is nothing firm nor eternal. But Jesus Christ, my King, is a King in the other world, that is, an everlasting King; postpone thy glorying and thy pleasures, therefore, till thou goest thither, and be content with the treatment thou receivest here. Thy King has not given thee orders to remain here; He will have nothing to do with the world outside of the testimony of truth.—All Christians, I say, need this consolation, but especially they who hold the ministerial office and ply the Word.

For this reason St. Paul urges Timothy with these words, referring to Christ's confession before Pilate, to hold fast to the pure doctrine and not to let it be falsified. The world and the devil cannot bear the Word, and oppose it with all manner of confusion. Every pastor should and must, therefore, cling to the testimony mentioned, and recognize Christ as that King, in whom he finds comfort, and whom he hopes to enjoy,—but not on earth. He says, "But now is my kingdom not from hence." And again, "I am a king . . . for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto

the truth." Whosoever, therefore, desires to have this King Jesus, let him lay hold on the truth, which is His Word, and know that he shall not on account of His kingdom have greater abundance on earth; yea, let him know that he shall have to bear many a misfortune on account of the Word, even as did Christ, the King, Himself. But when life on earth is over, then shall come the full enjoyment of the Lord Jesus' kingdom.

The Pope and bishops never knew this consolation. They do not recognize as king one who does no more than bear witness unto the truth, and cry with Pilate: "What is truth?" Had we nothing else we would, no doubt, have to go a begging. Therefore will we have another king,—one who can give us plenty of money, possessions, honor, power and everything; as for this King and His truth, they may in the meanwhile fare as they can. But St. Paul cautions against such folly. And every pious pastor should earnestly heed this admonition, and depend upon it that we shall not be glorified on earth, and that all our glory here shall be to bear witness unto the truth. Earth's reward for this service shall be in our case what it was in the Lord Jesus' case, the gallows and the executioner. Learn to suffer and to hear such things, and let it be your faith and hope, that, although you must suffer here, still this suffering shall, in the other world, be rewarded and made good by the Lord Jesus, the eternal King! But this must suffice for a brief consideration of the testimony before Pilate.

We must now examine the third point also. It is this: Pilate and the Jews greatly undervalue the

blood of our dear Lord Jesus, which, finally, falls on them as a crushing and eternal burden.

Matthew mentions in particular that Pilate washed his hands before the multitude, and said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." He thought he had done his whole duty in making several attempts to liberate Christ, and that he could not help it that the Jews resisted him in his efforts. Still he delivered the Lord to be crucified. Just as though his saying "I am innocent" would make him innocent! Had he desired a warning, his wife might have told him how innocent he would be; for she, as related above in the text, had spent a whole night suffering many things in a dream, from which she could judge the severity of the judgment which Pilate would bring upon himself and all belonging to him by consenting to the death of "that just man." But so it always is with the blood of the Lord Jesus and with that of His Christians. Herod the elder slew all Bethlehem's innocent infants. His son slew the holy John the Baptist. Both dared to think themselves benefited by their murder. Neither did Pilate here regard it as much out of the way that he sentenced Christ to die. He thought that his opinion would also be God's opinion, and that God would, therefore, hold him innocent. But without doubt God's wrath did not tarry long till it utterly destroyed the house, the tribe, the name of Pilate, and then thrust his body and soul into hell and into the eternal fire. There he discovered how innocent he was of this blood!

But the Jews went about this murder with still greater recklessness. When Pilate said, "See ye to

it," they shamelessly burst out with the cry, "His blood be on us, and on our children," that is, in case He should be wronged, we are willing that we and our children shall suffer for it. It was easily said, and seemed to have been spoken with impunity. But before forty years had passed they saw their imprecation about to be answered. And then this "blood" began to flow down upon them in such streams that Jerusalem and the whole Jewish kingdom soon were desolate, the people lamentably slain, and all things overthrown. But even this sufficed not; from that time till this, and it is now nearly fifteen hundred years, they have wandered about in misery, nowhere finding a continuing city.

This temporal punishment, so that they have no cities nor government of their own, is truly severe, but it shall come to an end. But this is truly terrible that their hearts are so horribly imbittered against Christ, the Son of God. Instead of seeking and expecting forgiveness of sin and eternal life and salvation, as they should, of Christ, their King and God, they abuse and revile Him, thus taking delight in falsehood and error, and diligently seek means of darkening the Scriptures before their own eyes and preventing their understanding it. Therefore, when they fancy that they are calling upon and serving God, they really serve the very devil. Neither does God hear them. And since they desire no freedom from sin through the Son of God, there can be nothing surer to them than that they must die in their sins and be forever ruined. In the 8. chapter of John, Christ tells them this

very thing: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."

They did not, at that time, perceive this calamity, and even thought that the sooner Christ could be slain the better it would be for them. Without any further thought, therefore, they said: If He is wronged, may we and our children be punished! But even as the thirty pieces of silver afforded Judas a joy of only short duration, so also a change soon came upon the Jews. From day to day failure advanced upon all their affairs, until, in the end, they went to utter ruin. This is, therefore, a fit subject for the serious meditation especially of great kings and princes; these should remember what an easy, trifling thing it seemed for Pilate and the Jews to shed innocent blood, and how this finally forced them into the abyss of hell.

When our bishops and their idol, the Pope, have succeeded in seizing a pious, faithful minister and pastor, they hurry him off to the stake or to the gallows, and dream they have done well; they do this, therefore, like Pilate and the Jews, with wantonness. But their success is not made certain yet; alas, such an end as theirs shall be! For it is impossible that God should look long upon such deeds in silence; innocent blood cries so mightily into His ears that He must rise and inflict punishment.

Pilate was thrust so low that now, no doubt, not a single person of his name or tribe remains. The Jews to this day are laboring under the blood of Jesus Christ, and it will finally press them down to hell. The great and powerful emperors and the

mighty princes in the Romish and all other kingdoms, and every one else that has ever persecuted Christians,—they all have been lamentably overthrown and slain.

And surely the same fate awaits the enemies of Christ of our day, who act as tyrants and persecute and murder Christians for the Gospel's sake. Let no one fear that punishment shall fail to come! They who meddle with the innocent blood of Christians, though they may be as mighty as the Emperor Augustus, must still go down, together with all their descendants. They may, indeed, be thinking now that we are heretics and that they do right by slaying us. So thought Pilate, and especially the Jews, but it availed them nothing. Let every one, therefore, take good care of himself and let alone the blood of Christians! At first it seems a little sin,—a trifle merely; but in the end, everything that is stained with Christians' blood shall be utterly destroyed, as all history testifies.

May Almighty God resist all tyrants, mercifully grant peace unto His Church, graciously keep us by His Word and save us forever. Amen.

NINTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST LED AWAY TO BE CRUCIFIED.—SIMON BEARS THE CROSS AFTER HIM.—THE WOMEN WHO FOLLOW BEWAIL AND LAMENT HIM.

LUKE 23, 26-31. And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Simon's bearing the cross and the women's weeping occurred while Christ was being led from Pilate to the place of execution. Matthew, Mark and Luke alike make mention of Simon, a Cyrenian, to show, no doubt, that what is said of him was no accident, as it might seem, but so ordained by God for a special purpose, viz.: that at the very time when Christ should be led away to suffer, all Christians might have an example set, from which to learn how they should fare on earth,—that they must bear the cross after the Lord Jesus, like Simon here. This good and pious man, not knowing in what the Jews at Jerusalem were engaged, went into the city according to his need and opportunity, to attend to his business. And now, as the Lord and the two murderers were led toward him, and the Lord, on account of weakness,

could carry no further the cross which had been placed on Him, and which, since a strong, full-grown man was to be nailed to it, must have been pretty heavy, the soldiers ran up to good, pious Simon and compelled him to take up the cross or tree, to which Christ was to be nailed, and to bear it after the Lord.

This looks as if it had happened incidentally. But it is, as already said, a picture of all Christians, which God wished to show to His Church just when His dear Son, Jesus Christ, was Himself suffering, so as to check that common offence which is so apt to lead us all astray. For as soon as God comes to us with the cross, attacking our body or property, giving us ill-bred children or sending some other misfortune or calamity, our courage fails us. We then conclude that God does not wish us well, and that if He loved us He would deal more gently with us. We take the fact that He permits us to be troubled, afflicted and tormented as an indication that He is angry with us and refuses to be gracious.

Now, the picture in our text is to operate against offences of this kind. In the first place, we see the Son of God bearing His cross Himself and finding it so heavy that it nearly throws Him down and that He can scarcely walk. Mark this well! For if such things happen to the green and fruitful tree, about which we shall soon be told, it is easy to infer that better things shall not and can not happen the dry and unfruitful tree. In the second place, we see pious Simon doing the work that others should have done; had he not come near where Christ was compelled to carry His cross, he would never

have needed to bear a cross. But here he suffers for the Lord Jesus; because Christ carries the cross, he also must suffer and help to carry it. Remember, it shall never be different with Christians here; they must all submit with Simon and bear the cross after Christ.

Although God may bear with the wicked for a while and permit them to receive everything that their hearts wish and covet, still their punishment shall not be delayed always. They too must suffer here on earth, receiving now here a kick then there a thrust, and never afterward enjoying uninterrupted success, as the 32. Psalm tells us: "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about," and as is glaringly shown by examples.

Severe and violent were the sufferings of ungodly Pharaoh and his Egyptians. And how much misfortune, oppression and grief did not the Jews have to bear in the desert and afterward in the land of Canaan, until, finally, the Assyrian wasted the ten tribes, and, some time after, even Judah's tribe was flung into the whirlpool of woes and the entire land conquered by the Babylonians! But it is not necessary to cite many instances. Each one need merely think of what he himself has seen and experienced in his own case and in that of others. It is, therefore, impossible that punishment, distress, wretchedness and tribulation should finally fail to follow where God is not feared and where His Word and will are resisted.

But from the case of Simon here we must learn to make a difference between the holy cross and the well-deserved punishment and misery of the

wicked. No wonder if the knave fares badly; for he rushes to his doom with open eyes. If the thief would stop his stealing he would, no doubt, remain secure against the gallows and the hangman. As for men and women, if they would refrain from debauchery, they might enjoy wealth, honor and health. But since they do not desist, but continue in sin, God punishes them with poverty, disgrace, disease, or other misfortunes. These wicked ones wish nothing else and nothing better; for by their sin and impenitent lives they themselves furnish the cause for their misery and distress; they urge God, who would delight in being merciful and in giving them all good things, yea, they compel Him to make His anger burn at once, to heap destruction on them and to stem the tide of sin. Peter therefore says, 1 Pet. 4, 15: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." He thus makes this distinction, that not all suffering is to be called a "cross;" for that which the wicked suffer is not their cross, but their punishment and merited reward; while that which Christians suffer, like Simon here, is called and is in reality a "cross," because it is not merited, but the fault of others. If Simon had not just happened to meet the Lord Jesus, he would have been let alone; but he has to suffer for it that he came where Christ was being led to the crucifixion.

In this way all Christians should suffer and bear the cross; even as Peter says: Not "suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, . . . yet . . . as a Christian," that is, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His

Word and confession. All Christians acknowledge themselves to be poor sinners, and know that through sin they have deserved all the calamities God sends upon them on earth, and many more. They are, indeed, the only ones who acknowledge their short-comings, weakness and transgressions; for sin's peculiar punishment is eternal death, and not this or that particular temporal misfortune. Nevertheless, their suffering is not the punishment for sin, but the real and holy "cross." His being a sinner and his stumbling and falling occasionally, is not the reason why the Christian is hated by the evil adversary and the world. No, both the devil and the world could well tolerate that, and would be satisfied with the Christian as far as that is concerned. But the Christian holds to the Word and has faith; he put his hope in Christ, the Son of God, and is comforted in His death and resurrection; he fears God and tries to live according to His will; he labors hard, by means of his confession, to persuade others to believe and to come to the knowledge of Christ. This it is that neither the devil nor his tender bride, the world, can endure; this it is that makes Satan rage so terribly against all Christians; this it is that makes him always pursue them, afflicting their bodies with disease and sometimes their property with loss by storms, or hail, or fire, as it was the case with Job. (Job 1.) And sometimes he troubles them with great secret torments of conscience, such as melancholy, sadness, fear, trembling, doubts, dread of death, and like fiery darts of the devil, about which the Psalms lament so much. Of this kind was the temptation of Paul which he mentions 2 Cor. 12: "There was

given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me," &c. And what the world does in this direction is easily seen, especially in times like the present, when poor Christians receive such wretched and horrible treatment.

This is bearing the Lord Jesus' cross as Simon did. Simon was certainly also a poor sinner, but what is that to these soldiers? It is not for this that they make him suffer, but they make him suffer because Christ, who cannot get along with His cross, is present and needs some one to help Him bear the cross.

Therefore, although thou art a poor sinner, and confessest how thou hast in various ways sinned against God; still, because thou believest in Christ, thy sins are not the chief cause of all thy crosses and afflictions, and thy sins are not that for which the devil and the world punish thee. Nay, it would be their joy and rejoicing if thou wouldst be altogether on their side, and not on that of God and His Word. It is chiefly on account of the Lord Jesus, His Word and thy faith that thou must suffer.

This, that Simon bears the Lord Jesus' cross, is the first thing to be learned here. It is profitable especially for consolation, giving us certainty that we shall realize our hope of help and salvation, and provoking us to prayer. For he who, when he lies under the cross and in misery, thinks only of his being a sinner and deserving such punishment, is, by such thoughts, made too cold and too lazy to pray. For it is the nature of sin always to terrify

the heart, to make it fearful and timid, and to deprive it of the consolation and the hope that God will bestow aught that is good. But if we consider the real, chief reason why the devil and the world are such bitter enemies of ours and heap all manner of mischief on us, we shall have to confess that it is not on account of our sins that they are so furious. They would like, and this is their constant aim, to plunge us into all sin and shame, to succeed in which would be their pleasure and satisfaction. They are opposed to us, they seek where they can to do us harm and hate us, especially because we heed the Word of God, confess the Lord Jesus, place our confidence in the goodness and grace of God and desire to live according to His will, in His fear and love, and in faith and obedience. This is the fountain and foundation of their hatred and envy. Mark well, thou must therefore not deny that thou art a poor sinner, and that thou hast by thy sins deserved every calamity. For God punishes also His own for their sins, as Peter says, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." But Satan and the world, so say to thyself, are not angry with me on this account; they would be satisfied with me if I, like a hog in the mire, remained impenitent in my sins. But why, then, do they hate me? Simply because I believe and confess that the Man who here bears the cross is my God and Saviour.

Now, if this is true, what shall we do next? Shall we despair? No, as you prize your soul, no! Firm hope must be ours. And though we are miserable sinners, it is still most sure that the Lord Jesus will not let us perish as long as we suffer for

His sake. He can help us mercifully, and He will do so. And as we suffer and die with Him, so shall we also be exalted with Him into glory and live with Him forever. But let us boldly open our mouth and cry, saying: O Lord, we are, indeed, poor sinners, and by our disobedience have deserved infinitely severer chastisement than we are now bearing; but look, O Lord, at the wicked enemy's intentions. The enemy hates Thee and Thy name, and hates us too because we hold fast to Thee and Thy name, find comfort in Thy Word, and hope for mercy through Thy death and merits. Therefore, dear Lord Jesus Christ, be Thou avenged on them, and help us for Thy name's sake.—Such thoughts make the heart cheerful and give it confidence and boldness to pour itself out in prayer. For this reason the holy Prophets also prayed in this way, constantly pleading the name of God, as David does in the 44. Psalm: "Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." Let the preceding, about Simon's being compelled by the soldiers to suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus by bearing His cross, be said, then, for the special purpose of teaching the distinction between the Christian's cross and the wicked man's punishment for sin.

The second thing to be learned here is that Simon not only bears the cross, but also bears it because he is compelled to do so. For if he would have had his own will in the matter, he would have gone his way and cared very little what was becoming of Christ and His cross. But the soldiers seize him against his will, and compel him to carry the cross.

This subject teaches us also very nicely what really is and what is not a cross. Monks and nuns who are in earnest, lead an austere life and oppress themselves with the most difficult labor. But this is not the cross of Christ which Simon bears. Why? Because they have placed it on themselves from their own free choice and without the command of God. And just so the Anabaptists do. But the proverb, "what is done from choice is done with ease," might be applied to such suffering; since it is self-imposed, and might be avoided, it cannot hurt very badly. But when one is compelled to bear the cross and does it reluctantly, then it becomes heavy and oppressive. It is this idea that Christ expresses when He says, John 21, to Peter: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Let Christians be ever so perfect, flesh and blood cannot help but shudder at, fear and shun the cross.

For this reason this man is called Simon or Simeon, which, in his language, means one who takes advice and obeys. For that is true obedience which, though it prefers to be exempt from this or that suffering, still yields to it willingly, following and letting itself be led, simply because it sees that God desires it so. All true Christians can be called by this name Simon. For although their flesh and blood would like to rest and be excused from pain, they still obey, heed the Word, are submissive to the will of God, and help the Lord Jesus bear His cross.

The third thing to be learned here is to distinguish between Simon and the Lord Jesus. Simon bears the cross after the Lord Jesus as far as the place of execution and then goes away; while Christ allows Himself to be nailed to the cross and dies on it. This is the true difference between the suffering of Christ and our suffering. Our suffering does not earn the forgiveness of sins. This is accomplished alone by the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. He alone is the true Sacrifice and Lamb of God which pays and atones for the sins of all the world and, for this reason, hangs upon the cross. But Simon merely carries the cross; that is, our bearing the cross does nothing more with the old Adam than molest him, and nothing more with sin than oppose it. But it is the work and merit of our Lord Jesus alone that forgives our sins.

Thus, beloved, you perceive that this Simon is a pattern for all Christians, for they must bear the cross of the Lord Jesus; and that it is not, however, on account of this bearing that their sins are forgiven. The bearing of the cross serves to restrain the old Adam, lest he become too wild. But when the cross is to be the means of the forgiveness of sins, it will not do for Simon to bear it, but then Christ must hang and die on it. This is the reason why Simon is set free. By Christ's death we are set free from death and receive eternal life, as this is clearly pointed out in that part of our text which we are about to treat.

St. Luke tells us that as the Lord was led out of Jerusalem, some women followed, bewailing and lamenting Him. The Lord turned to them and

told them not to weep for Him, but for themselves and for their children, because the time was coming when the woman without child would be called blessed, and when, as Hosea says, men would desire the mountains to fall upon and cover them. But the reason of such calamity and woe was, that since Christ, the green tree, was so badly treated, they, the dry and barren tree, would be treated still worse.

Although these things referred especially to the Jews of that day, they still show us how to make proper use of our Lord Jesus' sufferings; first, by revealing sin as a terrible burden,—the Son of God Himself being compelled to die on account of our sin; and then, by consoling us against sin by means of Christ's sufferings,—the Son of God having rendered satisfaction and atoned for sin upon the cross.

Notice, first, the difference which the Lord makes between Himself and the Jews, for on this difference a great deal depends. Himself He compares to a young tree, so beautiful and fruitful that it should be bought for a garden, and by no means cut down and cast into the fire. Nevertheless, the latter is done. God lets Him be cut down, that is, He lets Him now be led out to the cross, where He is to be slain as the greatest malefactor, notwithstanding that He is such a fine, sappy, beautiful and fruitful tree. He is without all sin and walks before God in perfect obedience, and all things He says and does are purely noble and precious fruits, every one of which is a joy to God and a blessing to us. In short, we find nothing about the Lord Jesus that is not grace, life and salvation. The Jews on the

other hand, He compares to an old, barren, dry and rotten tree, which is altogether out of place in the garden, and only fit to be felled and burned. For they did not heed God's Word. John's preaching brought no fruit; they said John had a devil. Christ, the Son of God, Himself and His Apostles preached. Neither did they pay any attention to Him, but called Him a wine-bibber, said He had a devil, and hated and envied Him so bitterly that they had no peace until they had brought Him from life to death. Nevertheless, since they had Moses, the law, and the external worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem, they dared to think that they were God's people, that they were living saints, indeed, and that they rested in God's bosom. Now, it is easy to imagine, if the Son of God, who is a fine, fruitful tree, is visited by so severe a judgment of God, how infinitely severe shall be the fate of the terribly great sinners, the dry trees. It was the Lord's desire that the Jews should understand this now and not continue in their sin; that, by seeing Him, who, though innocent, was crucified and killed, they might learn to fear the wrath of God and to flee from it by true repentance. Little, however, did this warning avail. The dry tree could yield no fruit, and so was cast into the fire. History shows this, where it tells us that about forty years after Christ's death a most terrible judgment came upon the Jews for their sin, the Romans desolating their whole land. For themselves, therefore, even as the Lord here counsels and exhorts them to do, and not for Christ, should they have wept, acknowledging their sins and repenting.

We too, however, should take this advice to heart. For we all must confess that we have many and great sins and, therefore, are dry and unfruitful trees,—trees which do not and can not yield anything good. What, then, shall we do? Nothing except weep and cry to God for pardon, and earnestly resist and curb our evil, sinful nature and inordinate desires. For we are admonished here, that since the fruitful tree receives such shameful treatment, God permitting His dear Son to suffer so severely, we should not feel secure, nor laugh, nor skip carelessly along, like the world, which neither hears nor knows this warning of the Lord. But we should weep, we should discern our sins, we should heartily lament that we have been so corrupted by sin and that we have become unfruitful trees; we should fear the wrath of God on this account and pray for mercy and forgiveness.

The first thing for us specially to learn from the sufferings of Christ is to fear God and His anger on account of our sins, and not to give the reins to sin. This we must do for ourselves, for we are a dry, unfruitful tree, which is fit only for the fire.

But the Lord teaches us still another thing here. We should weep for ourselves and for our children; but for Him we should not weep, but laugh, rejoice and be of good cheer. For why does He suffer? He is a genuine, good and fruitful tree, and has not deserved such a cruel fate, but bears it for our sin's sake. And as He now proceeds to the cross it is His only aim to perform the work of His priestly office, and not only to pray for sinners, but also to sacrifice His body and His life upon the altar of the

cross for them, so that this offering may reconcile God, liberate poor sinners from His wrath, and make them heirs of everlasting life. The Lord, therefore, does not want us to think of His sufferings as of something for which we should weep. He wants us to rejoice, to glorify God, to thank Him for His mercy, to praise, to extol and to confess Him, because His going to the cross has brought to us the grace of God, freed us from sin and death, and made us God's dear children.

But the first of these lessons goes down as hard with us as the second, and the second as hard as the first. We prefer the ways of the world to the warning and advice of the Lord Jesus. We should weep for ourselves, because sin has polluted us so, and because so terrible a judgment awaits us. But where is the man to be found who weeps? The deeper men sink into the slime of sin, the more secure and joyful they grow. Man deems his joy, glory and life perfect, as we have said several times before, when he has numerous occasions for sinning. No sum of money can satiate the miser's maw. The more advantage the greedy man can take and the freer access to gain he has, the happier he becomes, and he verily imagines that he has done his work well. Just so it is with other sins, such as anger, lewdness, envy, pride. Who cares for them? Who weeps for them? They are loved by every one and every one yields to them.

How the Jews succeeded with such work we clearly see. It behooves us, therefore, to repent and, as the Lord now so faithfully exhorts when He is about to die, to be concerned and grieved for

ourselves. And it is certain, once for all, that our sins shall be punished with eternal death unless we are freed from them.

Even as we are disobedient with reference to the first lesson, for no one weeps and none lament their sins; so do we disobey in regard to the second, for no one wishes heartily to rejoice over the dear Lord Jesus. Money, possessions, honor and the like, mean and little though they be, rejoice the heart; while that which is exclusively grace and life and salvation finds the heart almost chilled and dead, and void of all longing and desire and heart-felt eagerness to possess this treasure.

These lessons, when attention is paid merely to their words, are, indeed, easily and quickly learned; but when, on the other hand, they are to be mastered in their relation to our heart and sinful nature, the task is most difficult and even impossible. Our determination to invert these lessons is hereditary. Instead of weeping for our sins, we laugh about them. Instead of laughing and exulting with all our heart that Christ has died for us, we weep. Now, we either regard this rejoicing on account of Jesus as not superior to the more popular joys of the world; or else sin and the wrath of God have seized our souls and banished from them the desire and the ability to be comforted. Christ's "Weep not for me" hardly penetrates the heart. We weep and lament and despair as though Christ had not died, not paid for our sins, not averted God's anger, and not delivered us from death.

Before either lesson can be learned, therefore, prayer is necessary. We must pray, first, that God,

by His Holy Spirit, would move our hearts, disgust us with and dissuade us from sin, and shield us from false security. We must pray, again, that He would kindle in our souls the flame of consolation against sin, and seal there the confidence in the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ Jesus; so that we may truly worship God, like poor sinners fear Him, abide in repentance and trust in His goodness with all our heart; for He does not wish us harm, seeing that for the forgiveness of our sins He delivered His Only Begotten into death, even the death of the cross. May our dear Lord Jesus grant us this. Amen.

TENTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST NAILED TO THE CROSS.—HIS DEEDS, SUFFERINGS AND WORDS ON THE CROSS.

MATT 27, 33-56. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink. And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched Him there; and set up over His head His accusation written, This is Jesus the King of the Jews. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him; one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. And many women were there beholding a far off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

Each of the four Evangelists makes a record of the things that occurred on the cross. Still, sometimes one of them mentions a thing that the rest of them omit. Before treating, therefore, on the true doctrine taught in our text, we propose to recite the history of the cross in its details as furnished by all four Evangelists.

When the soldiers had brought the Lord Jesus to Golgotha, the place for executing public malefactors, "they gave Him," as Matthew relates, "vinegar to drink mingled with gall." This gall was not the gall of a live beast, but a compound of all sorts of bitter herbs. This drink, as some suppose, was given to dying criminals, to hasten their departure. But the Lord would not drink of it, for He had willingly yielded to this death. The word gall is used in this sense in Deut. 29, Ps. 69, Jer. 8, and in other places. Immediately after this, the soldiers nailed Him to the cross and two malefactors with Him, one on His right and one on His left. The Lord Jesus, however, as the true priest who must now attend to His priestly office, prayed for those who crucified Him and for all poor sinners, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." We shall have occasion to see the fruit of this prayer when we come to speak of the malefactor on the right of Christ; for to him it was that Gospel and sermon, from which he learned to know Christ as the Son of God, that He hanged upon the cross as the atonement for the sins of the whole world, and that after His bodily death He would live and reign with God, His Father, in eternity.

The Evangelists announce that Pilate placed the superscription, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," written in three languages, over the head of the Lord Jesus. It was customary to do this, so that every one might know why people were executed, and take warning. The superscription over the head of the Lord Jesus was to serve the special purpose of admonishing the Jews, even while He was hanging miserably on the cross, not to be offended in Him, but to take Him for their King. But it was in vain! The title made them so indignant that they accosted Pilate thus: "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am the King of the Jews." But Pilate was much displeased with them and would not alter the superscription, which remains an eternal testimony against the Jews, that they could not rest until they had crucified their King.

Hereupon the soldiers, four in number, took the Lord Jesus' garments, separating them into four parts. His coat, however, which was without seam, being woven, they did not rend, but cast lots for it. And John says that this had been prophesied in the Scriptures. He would have us understand by this that the taking of the Lord's garments was no accident, but done by God's special counsel, that it might serve the Church as an emblem; for it shows, first, that the world is not satisfied even when it has put Christians to death, but takes what little property Christians may have and plunders them. This we can see in our old histories, where Julian and other blood-hounds and tyrants drove poor Christians away from their possessions and took from them what they had. We see it not there

only, but we have living instances of tyrants and bishops who are well enough pleased when their subjects, contrary to their command, eat meat, hear Lutheran (as they call them) sermons, receive both bread and wine in the Sacrament, and the like; for then they have plausible reasons to oppress their subjects, to sell or trespass upon their property, or to tax them as they please. But we can also see how much richer such money makes them. Money thus unrighteously extorted devours all they have, so that afterward they are neither blest nor prosperous.

The soldiers' casting lots upon the vesture of the Lord can, no doubt, be applied to sects and heretics. The Holy Scriptures is the coat which our Lord Jesus puts on, and in which He can be seen and found. This coat is woven throughout, and all its threads are so interlocked that it cannot be cut nor divided. But the soldiers who crucify Christ, that is, heretics and sects, interest themselves in this coat. Their chief fault is that they want the whole coat, that is, that they try to convince every one that all Scripture harmonizes with them and their opinions. The Sacramentarians of our day serve as an illustration. They regard the words, "This is my body," "This is my blood," as insignificant, saying that they are only a single passage, while the Bible, as they boast, is full of passages which prove Christ to be no longer on earth, but in heaven.

The manner of all sects is to adopt a special opinion without consulting the Word; this opinion then hangs continually before their eyes, like blue glasses, and everything they see is blue, that is, according to their own opinion. But they are

knaves, as St. Paul calls them, Eph. 4, where he admonishes us to be no more "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." The Greek word here translated "sleight" is *kybia*, which means, in English, playing at dice, or trickery. Now, as the knave masters the die so that it must fall to suit him, so sects and fanatics master the Word. Every one wants the whole of it, and makes use of the die. But let us proceed with the history.

As the Lord was hanging on the cross He saw His mother and His mother's sister and John with them, and "He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother!"

After this, men of every station began the most heartless scoffing. The chief priests, scribes and elders, as Matthew writes, said, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God." With such pointed, poisonous words they wished not only to insult the Lord, but also to alienate from Him the people, so that they would not respect Him, so that they would slight and despise all the miracles they had seen and all the sermons they had heard, and so that they would regard Him as a blasphemer. The soldiers, who as Gentiles cared not about God, mocked Him in a different way, giving Him vinegar to drink, "and saying, If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself."

Finally, even one of the malefactors "railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." But the other rebuked him for this, saying:

And dost even thou not fear God? There thou hangest and in less than an hour or two all will be over with thee. Thou hast all thy life been a scoundrel, like myself, and hast well deserved this punishment. Is it not high time to think of thy salvation and to leave such foolish words unspoken? After giving this reproof he turned to the Lord and said, "Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." And Jesus answered, "Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

In the mean time came deep darkness, most unnatural and terrible. The agony of death pressed from the Lord the cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The Jews well enough understood the meaning of this cry; still their bitterness and their fierceness urged them to pervert Christ's word and say: "This man calleth for Elias. . . . Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him!"

"Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." Then the soldiers took a sponge filled "with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished." By these words He meant to say: The world and the devil have now done all that lies in their power, and therefore I have now done all that the redemption of mankind demands, and all that the Prophets have foretold in Holy Writ; the work is done! Then He "cried with a loud voice, . . . Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, He gave up the ghost."

Immediately after, "the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom," as a testimony that the proper offering had been made to God at last, and that now the law and its sacrifices, which were merely a type of the sacrifice just made, were forever abrogated. The temple was so constructed that the people stood to hear the Word of God and to sing and pray in the apartment nearest the entrance. This was separated from another apartment, which was similar to the chancels in some of our churches, into which were admitted only the priests, who there offered sacrifices and did the other things belonging to the service of God, and which, because none except the holy priests dared enter there, was called the holy place. Beyond this was still another apartment, called the holy of holies, in which stood the mercy-seat. This was separated from the holy place by means of a vail, beyond which no one was allowed to go except the high priest, and he only once every year, when he offered for his sins and for the sins of all the people. It is this vail that the Evangelists tell us was rent. They mention this to testify to us that God's services, as they were conducted in the holy of holies, are ended and abolished, and this because the highest priest, God's Son, has offered now unto God, His Father, for the sins of the whole world, not the blood of goats and calves, but His own body and blood.

This rending of the vail took place while the earth quaked so violently that the rocks rent and that the graves of numerous saints were opened. Out of these graves, after the resurrection of Christ, arose many bodies of the saints, who appeared unto

many in Jerusalem, who preached concerning the Lord Jesus and who testified that He was Christ, the true Messiah. These ascended to heaven with the Lord Jesus to live there forever, like Enoch and Elias, whom God took into heaven alive, the former before the flood and the latter three thousand years after the creation of the world. God desired to preserve to His Church in every age a sure testimony of the resurrection from the dead. The number was greater, however, in the case before us than it had ever been in any other case.

Now when the centurion, who had to remain at the cross, and others, saw the earthquake and the other unusual "things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."

All this, according to the Evangelists, took place at the cross before Christ expired. But we cannot consider the whole of it in one sermon. For the present, therefore, we shall confine ourselves to two points. First, why the Evangelists quote more Scripture when they give the history of the passion than on any other subject. Secondly, why God destined His Son to die upon the cross.

The Evangelists cite so many Scripture passages for every part of the history of Christ's sufferings, in order to combat the offence occasioned at sight of these sufferings, which must have sorely tried the disciples in particular. Not only the unbelieving Jews, but even the disciples of Jesus were offended at Christ's dying such a miserable and ignominious death. Both the Jews and the disci-

ples thought that if this were Christ He would surely build up again the poor, oppressed and ruined kingdom. Why, even after Christ's resurrection the disciples continued to think in this way, for they lamented that the Lord was about to ascend to heaven and depart from the earth, and at the mount of Olives they asked Him, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

When the Lord had now fallen into the hands of His enemies and had suffered Himself to be slain on the cross, all the hopes which the disciples had entertained for His glory vanished. The two disciples who went to Emmaus freely confessed this, saying: "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," as if they would say: It is all over now; we hoped for things different from those which we have realized. The Jews were offended still more seriously; for, because the Lord was dying so shamefully and would not save Himself, they regarded Him, in spite of His miracles and sermons, as an impostor, and tauntingly demanded that He should come down from the cross if He were the Son of God, so that they might believe in Him. The Jews hated Jesus, the disciples loved Him; the Jews rejoiced in His misfortune, the disciples were saddened and discouraged by it. Notwithstanding that they were thus differently disposed toward Christ, they all, both disciples and Jews, thought that it was all over with Him now and that He was not the true Messiah.

But how must we account for this opinion and for such offence? Simply thus: they left the Scriptures out of sight and had not diligently

studied the Prophets. For it is written in the Prophets, Isa. 53, that the Messiah must suffer and die. The Scriptures, Isa. 53, declare that He should be "numbered with the transgressors." In the 41. Ps. and in the 11. chap. of Zech. we are told that His "own familiar friend" should betray Him and sell Him for "thirty pieces of silver." The 22. Ps. plainly tells us that the soldiers should part His garments among them, and cast lots upon His vesture, while the 69. declares that when He shall thirst in His agony upon the cross they shall give Him vinegar to drink. It had been prophesied that there should not a bone of Him be broken and that a spear should pierce His side, Ex. 12, Zech. 12, &c. Now, if the disciples and the Jews had carefully studied the writings of the Prophets, instead of finding cause for offence in Christ's sufferings and scandalous death, they would have found comfort therein. If they had studied the Scriptures, the fact that it came to pass just as the Holy Spirit, who cannot lie nor err, through the Prophets and in the Psalms, had predicted concerning Christ, would have led them to the firm conclusion that this was the Messiah indeed. But they gave no heed to the Scriptures, and therefore could not resist the offence which, like a flood, swept them away, so that they entirely lost Christ.

The Apostles personally experienced the disadvantage of departing from the Scriptures and not following them, and therefore continually quote the Scriptures as they write the history of the passion. By so doing they would say: It seems ridiculous that the crucified Jesus, who hangs there so miserably upon the cross, and who was treated so

unmercifully and with such excessive wantonness by the soldiers, should be the Son of God and the true Messiah. But let us not be offended in Him! If we notice what the Holy Spirit had predicted long before through the Prophets concerning the Messiah, we shall find that this Jesus is the true Messiah, and that He bore what had been appointed for the Messiah to bear. It is most certainly true that if we do not hold to the Word we shall not be able to defend ourselves against the least offence. We are lost unless we take refuge in the Word.

Every one should, for this reason, flee, as if the devil himself were in pursuit, from sects and fanatics, like the Pope, the Sacramentarians and others, who try to substitute human notions for the written Word. If we yield to such as these, we step, as it were, from the rock into the quicksand, where, the more we try to gain a foot-hold, the more we sink, and where it is impossible to save ourselves. God's Word alone is the true and enduring rock that affords a sure foundation. Let him, therefore, who would walk in the right way, see that he has God's Word. When Christ says, "This is my body," "this is my blood," let him believe and not follow the deceivers who say, It is mere bread, it is mere wine. When Christ says, "He that believeth on me shall never see death," let him believe it and not obey the Pope, who points him to the sacrifice of the mass, to the intercession of saints and to good works. Then he may be sure that he is right, and that he has escaped the offence.

We now propose briefly to consider also the second point, viz.: why it was decreed in God's especial counsel that God's Son, our Lord and

Saviour, should die just as He did; for the Jews held the death upon the cross as the most offensive and disgraceful, and as far more detestable than we hold the death upon the gallows or the wheel. We find the reason for this written Deut. 21: "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."

Now, it is indifferent whether God pronounces this severe judgment upon those hanged in view of the future calamity that His Son Himself should be thus slain, or in view of the past calamity that disobedient man fell in Paradise and ate of the forbidden fruit. The chief and most important consideration here is, that we should learn and remember well that God calls all those accursed who die on the tree. For from this it immediately follows that, since Christ also died on a tree, He too became a curse and was called accursed. Hence the devil and the world took particular delight in bringing upon Him that very death which God Himself had called accursed. Paul, however, teaches us how we must understand this passage in Deut., and whether its contents ought to be a subject for joy or for offence; for in speaking of it he says, Gal. 3:

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree; that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gen-

tiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

We should, by all means, consider this passage carefully. Paul very nicely brings the two little words, "curse" and "blessing," side by side, and leads us back to the promise made to Abraham when God said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." For it follows that, if in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, all the nations of the earth must have been under the curse; else they would not have needed a promise of blessing. Again, this seed, in which the blessing was to come, must have been that only blessed seed, with which God is not wroth, but which He accompanies with pure grace and blessing. It is plain, however, who this seed of Abraham is; namely, Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, the Only Begotten of the Father, and the only one full of grace and truth. All others, counting from Adam to the very last man, are not children of grace by nature, but God is angry with them and hostile to them, and they are not blessed, but cursed. And why? Because they all are sinners.

But behold the result! The blessed seed of Abraham is nailed to that tree, or cross, to which God refers when He says, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;" and it is therefore no longer called the blessed seed, but the accursed. Paul comes out boldly with this, saying, Christ was "made a curse." Let us hear the reason for this.

It is we who, on account of our sins, are a curse, and under the wrath of God. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is full of grace and truth. How, then, does He come to be nailed to the tree?

Why does He thrust Himself under the wrath of God? It was for our sake, Paul tells us; "He was made a curse for us;" He desired to bear God's wrath and atone for our sins, that we might be made blessed, that is, receive the Holy Spirit, be freed from sin, and become the children of God. This may be illustrated by the case of a poor beggar who has many debts, but is unable to pay them; another man, who is able to pay these debts, comes to his assistance, becomes his surety, thus making himself a debtor, and pays the poor man's debts. Paul expresses this very nicely, Rom. 8: "The law could not" deliver us from sin and death, and so God Himself helped us. He sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," that is, His Son became man, assuming our flesh and blood. And God "for sin, condemned sin in the flesh," that is, God has made us free from sin through His only begotten Son, who became a sin-offering and had to atone for sin, thus bringing the blessing of Abraham upon us who were under the curse. In 2 Cor. 5, Paul himself interprets this latter: God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Christ, therefore, became both "a curse," and afterward also "sin," that is, a sin-offering, upon which rest the sins of all men, and hence also the wrath of God and a miserable death. Since these things rest upon this offering, we are relieved, for they rest on us no longer. This is the reason why John the Baptist calls Him a Lamb, meaning a sheep for the slaughter, a Sacrifice, appointed by God to take away the sins of the whole world. And the Lord Himself says, John 12: "And I, if I

be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And again, John 3: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Paul says that he did not know anything and was "determined not to know anything," "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Christ was crucified so that He might sanctify, deliver and justify us, who, had we been left to ourselves, would have eternally remained and perished under sin and death, and under the tyranny of Satan.

And should we now be offended at the cross? Was it, after all, an ignominious death? We should heartily thank God that His Son hangs upon the cross, bearing the curse under which we should still be on account of our sins. There He hangs as one condemned, and as one whom God hates and visits now with shame and want and agony. This is so, Paul says, for thy sake and for my sake, that the blessing might come on us. For if the curse had continued to rest on us, we would never have received the blessing. But lo, the blessed Seed draws near and takes the curse, which rests on us, upon Himself, and the blessing, which rests on Him, He gives to us. Since He would and should become a curse for us, no other death except this death on the cross was suitable, for this is the death which God's Word had declared accursed.

Let us, then, thoroughly learn here to judge, not according to what the eye perceives, but according to what the Word of God declares. According to appearances the Lord Jesus' death is a shameful death and, as God Himself calls it, an accursed

death ; and the tree on which He dies, an execrable tree,—a cursed cross, and this because all our sins hang on it. For sin and the curse, or God's anger, and every misfortune,—all these belong together. Therefore Isaiah says: "Many were astonished at Thee ; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." Again : "When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : and we hid as it were our faces from Him ; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." This is the way these things appear, and it is impossible for human reason to see them in a different light, because God calls every one accursed who dies on a tree. The cross is cursed ; He who hangs on it is cursed ; the cause of His hanging there is also cursed, for sin demands the curse ; and the greater the number of sins that lie on the Lord Jesus, the greater also the curse.

But let us look a little further and find what follows from this that Christ, the blessed Seed, dies such an accursed death and becomes a curse for us Himself. Paul, in very appropriate words, states this as the result : "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles," and that thus "we might receive the Holy Spirit." This we find to be altogether different from that which we can see with the bodily eye. This disgraceful death which God has cursed is an offence to the eye, but to us it is a blessed death, for it takes the curse away from us and brings God's blessing to us. The tree which in itself is an accursed tree, is for us a blissful tree. It is that precious altar, upon which God's Son

offers Himself to God, His Father, for our sins. It is that glorious altar, at which He appears as the true and eternal priest. For He is brought to the tree, and He makes it a blessed altar, that we might be released from sin, and receive God's grace and be God's children.

No wonder, then, that the old teachers entertained such excellent thoughts about the cross and the accursed tree. There in Paradise, they say, a beautiful tree occasioned our falling into sin and death; here, however, an old, dry, yes accursed tree occasioned our deliverance from sin and our receiving everlasting life. Here hangs God's Son with arms extended as a testimony that He will cast no one out, but gladly receive every one and draw all unto Him, as He says He will, John 12. His head is lifted toward heaven, pointing out to us the way of life eternal. His feet reach toward the ground where they braise the head of Satan, that old serpent creeping on the earth, forcing from him all his power. That power over us which Satan received because of our sins he surely loses now, in virtue of the dear Lord Jesus' hanging on the cross, where He atones for our sins with His death and becomes a curse in our stead.

Therefore, let us here learn to acknowledge and to praise our merciful heavenly Father's gracious will toward us. For He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to die, yea, to die upon the cross, and suffered Him to be made a curse; so that we might obtain the blessing, be set free from sin, receive the Holy Spirit, and through Him become God's children and be eternally saved. God grant this to us all. Amen.

ELEVENTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST'S PRAYER ON THE CROSS.—THE MALEFACTOR ON THE RIGHT.

LUKE 23, 32-43. And there were also two others, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

The holy Evangelist here mentions two things that are very consolatory. Therefore, although the other Evangelists have omitted them in their record of Christ's sufferings, we shall treat of them here, so that this record may be before us in its completeness. The first of these things is, that Christ, immediately after the cross, to which He had been nailed, was erected, began to pray, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The other thing we wish to notice is, that the malefactor on the right of Christ, hearing this prayer, learned from it that Jesus was the Son

of God and the very Christ, and therefore desired to be remembered by Him when He should have come into His kingdom.

Let us now consider these two things, for they are full of consolation and we can never sufficiently meditate upon them nor explain them. And, besides all this, it is necessary for us, not only to behold the works and sufferings of this Man, but also most carefully to heed the words proclaimed by Him; for these declare the reason of His deeds and sufferings, and their consequence.

It is of the greatest importance, however, to distinguish between the suffering of our Lord Jesus and that of all other men. This distinction is momentous, not only because Jesus Christ is eternal God, who created heaven and earth and all things, but also because His suffering had a peculiar cause, and because the benefit, or fruit, of His suffering is such that it could not have been produced by the suffering of any other man, or of an angel, or of any creature. He suffered, as you lately heard, not for Himself, but for us, that we might be delivered from sin and death. This we also learn from the words He here speaks in our text, which words it behooves every Christian to observe and to entwine in his soul as his most precious treasure and comfort.

The words He spoke upon the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," clearly show, that He was attending to His true priestly office even while suspended in the air upon the cross; and that He was fulfilling the work which brought Him to earth, not only with His suffering, in that He sacrificed Himself, but also

with prayer, both sacrifice and prayer belonging to the office of the priest. Christ tells us that the sacrifice consisted chiefly in His sanctifying Himself for our sakes, so that we "also might be sanctified through the truth," John 17; or, according to John 10, in His laying down His "life for the sheep." There are many more passages of this kind, all of which show that His sufferings were not to be for Himself, but for us. The zeal with which He here performed this work and offered this sacrifice was such that He even prayed that the Father would forgive those who crucified Him,—that He would pardon and not punish their sin. He prayed thus that all might know why He was brought to the cross, and that they might receive comfort from this knowledge.

This prayer, therefore, should teach us, first of all, that our dear Lord Jesus is a priest, and that He fulfilled the duties of His priestly office there upon the cross. To pray for sinners is, indeed, one of the proper employments of the priesthood. Now, Aaron, serving under the law, was invested with peculiar priestly apparel made for glory and for beauty. But would we know with what priestly robes Christ was clad and what the altar was at which He served, we need merely look at the cross. There we see Him entirely naked, full of wounds and void of every trace of sacerdotal splendor. Still He attended to His priestly duties most perfectly and carefully, even praying for His foes. Let us not be offended at His unpriestly appearance, for the work of this Priest has a significance entirely different from that of Moses' priests. This difference we learn even from the superscription

written over Him, which declares Him to be "The King of the Jews," the correctness of which title He had Himself publicly and clearly confessed before Pilate.

Neither does this title harmonize with His appearance. Instead of wearing a scarlet robe, His body is covered with blood and wounds and bruises. Instead of a golden crown, He wears a crown of thorns. There upon the cross we see a Priest and King, of whom the world is ashamed, whom the world despises, and whom it regards as neither King nor Priest. This is just what Isaiah says: "When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." This Priest offers us His own body and blood upon the cross in a place that was dishonored, desecrated, yea, accursed. This shall ever be our dearest, loveliest and most graceful garment, no matter how it is regarded by the world and the natural eye. Bulls, heifers and calves were sacrificed in the temple upon a consecrated altar, but Christ sacrifices Himself upon an altar that was not consecrated. Gallows and places of execution are to this day horrid and dishonorable, and Moses writes: "He that is hanged is accursed of God." Now, the world thinks it disgraceful and dishonorable that this Priest was not permitted to bring His offering even to the place where heifers and calves were sacrificed. But this was for us and for our good, that we might learn that He has brought a fully satisfactory offering for our sins, as it was stated

already in the preceding sermon. Since our sins could not be atoned for and removed by any other than this Priest who is the eternal Son of God, it is our fault that He could not have a more honorable altar and a more precious garment. This is no hindrance, however, to the discharge of His office. He not only does offer His body and blood, but also prays for poor, ignorant sinners.

We should, therefore, be heartily comforted because of this Priest and His office. Even as He suffers not alone for those who were present at His crucifixion, took hold of Him and nailed Him to the cross, so neither does He pray for them alone, but also for us, otherwise the prayer of Christ would receive too limited an interpretation. Those present then were merely our servants and ministers. Had it not been my sin and thy sin that nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross, these men would surely not have been able to molest Him.

He now comes forward as the true High Priest and Lamb of God, by the sacrifice of Himself to atone for the sins of all the world and to conquer death for men, and this is the only reason why the Jews and Gentiles receive power to harm Him. Thus we see that when He prays for those who crucify Him, He prays for us and all men, who by our sins had furnished the cause for His crucifixion and death. For this reason we should not regard the gallows, or the cross, on which Christ suffered, as anything else than that altar, upon which He offers up His life and at which He discharges the priestly duty of prayer, to the end that we might be free from sin and everlasting death. For whoever takes sin away, takes away death also, because

when sin is gone then death has lost its power, and therefore hell also.

Christ, our only and eternal High Priest, is the One who has done this for us on the cross. He has reconciled us to God, without the intervention of our works, by His own sufferings, having been made a curse for us, having died upon the cross for our sins, and having finally prayed for sinners. Let us, therefore, not forget heartily to thank Him for this.

True, even popery preaches on this theme. But, although the text tells us so clearly and the history relates to us so plainly that Christ sacrificed Himself upon the cross for our benefit, and that He suffered in our stead, popery uses many words to make the populace believe that men must be their own priests, that they themselves must sacrifice for sin, and that their own works must merit life eternal. Therefore, when we now teach, and God be praised that we do teach it, that the Evangelists plainly write that Christ, the true and eternal High Priest, has delivered us from death and obtained everlasting life for us by the sacrifice of Himself, the blind and wretched hirelings of the Pope curse and condemn the divine truth and call it scandalous heresy. Terrible and woeful anger, blindness and punishment has surely been poured out upon the ungrateful world in that the blasphemers, these Papists, themselves confess and preach that Christ offered Himself on the cross for us, and, at the same time, rage against us and shed innocent blood because we teach this doctrine and point the people to this sure and everlasting consolation. Truly, this is a realization of Isaiah's denunciation against

the despisers of God's Word: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not," and receive ye a hardened and foolish heart. If this were not the case it would be inexplicable why they so lightly esteem this Sacrifice and place all their confidence in their own, man-appointed works, such as cities, garments and food, "which all," Paul says, "are to perish with the using." O, why will men not take the consolation offered here, viz., that Christ sacrificed His body and His life and, praying for us, said: Father, here am I, a Mediator between Thee and poor sinners; I die for them; I give myself for them; be gracious unto them.

Notwithstanding that our adversaries themselves read, confess and preach this, they will continue to yell and foam at it and to condemn us as heretics. Well, this is the visitation of God's dreadful wrath upon them. May the Lord in mercy shield us against such visitation. But should He ever suffer us to fall, I pray that He would let us fall into a sin which we may feel and acknowledge, and not into one that bids direct defiance to His grace and that is looked upon as holiness, whose outward features it assumes.

Let us, therefore, open our hearts and behold Christ, our High Priest, in His proper priestly garment and at His proper priestly work. The eye does not see Him arrayed in beauty or in wealth, but finds Him ignominiously hanging there in misery and wretchedness. But if we look into His heart we shall discover ornaments so bright and treasures so rich that we can never thank Him for

them sufficiently. He is adorned, in the first place, with that most sincere obedience in which He glorifies His Father by permitting Himself to be spit upon, scourged and tortured. In this life we cannot fully comprehend the glory of this ornament; still we can understand enough of it to know that all pearls and purple and gold are nothing beside it. His other ornament is that great love He has for us which makes Him care so little about His life and His sufferings, almost forgetting them in the heart-felt interest He takes in our condition and in our need, and praying for us rather than for Himself. We cannot sufficiently understand such love as this; for in the heart of the Lord there is burning such a flame of love for us, that He does not seem to see or to feel His own most severe suffering, torture and disgrace, but only considers and perceives and cares for thy and my misery, distress and affliction.

We cannot help acknowledging that the love of the Lord, who is so concerned about us that He entirely overlooks His own danger, injury and pain, is indeed a mighty, burning love. Father and mother, when their dear child is in danger or want, rush through the fire to save it, caring not for their own safety, but only for that of their child. The love of our Lord Jesus is also such that He passes through affliction as through a fire, to grasp us with the hand of mercy and affection. Now, this is the fitting garment with which our eternal High Priest is arrayed. This is not an outer vestment for the eye of reason to behold; but the eye of faith perceives it in Jesus within, as His words also sufficiently testify.

The chief thing in the entire history of the passion is that Christ gave Himself for us and, caring for nothing as much as for our deliverance, reached toward us, and pursued us through all manner of affliction as through a fire. To this main point we should pay especial attention, and cling to it so closely that it cannot be wrested from our hands.

We have need of this doctrine not only as a source of comfort, but also as a source of strength, with which to counteract the poison prescribed to the people by the Pope, who would lift them into heaven by their own righteousness and work and merit. If our works could have done this, why was it necessary for Christ, the Son of God, to suffer? But here we find Him obediently and patiently bringing His offering, His own body and life, and beseeching His Father to have mercy and to forgive. This is proof sufficient that nothing of the kind could have been accomplished with our works; for it is not as easy a thing to obtain forgiveness of sins as the Papists dream. True, it is easy enough to put on a cowl and to fast, keep vigils and sing a great deal; but to come into possession of pardon for sin requires something quite different from our filthy works, and something far greater. If we rely on our fasts and vigils and prayers, we will have to wait quite a while indeed to receive help of God! But Isaiah states the plan: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;" "He hath borne our griefs." The Papists themselves are constrained to confess that the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus are far exalted above our prayers, our good works, our sufferings, our charity, our fasting. He, therefore, who tries

to atone for sin with such things as these, shall surely not succeed. To succeed in this requires, as Isaiah clearly says, a different man and different works and merits. Therefore, he who would apply his own merits to the removing of sin, blasphemes the death and sacrifice and prayer of Christ, because he makes his own prayer and offering equal, nay, superior, to the offering and prayer of Christ. Against this abomination we must diligently guard.

The Lord does not however, pray at random, but makes a distinction between those for whom He prays and others, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He thus designates two classes of sinners. Some know that they do wrong, and still do so without fear, prompted by pure malice and hatred against the acknowledged divine truth. These commit the "sin unto death," as it is called 1 John 5, that is, the sin against the Holy Ghost, if they continue in such willful sin and do not confess, abstain from and ask forgiveness for it, but remain impenitent to the end, and besides blaspheme the Word of God and the truth which cannot be gainsaid, as most of the Papists now are doing.

The Papists know that our doctrine is true and divine; they know that Christ commanded us to receive the whole Sacrament, that He did not forbid matrimony, that He gave no command concerning the sacrifice of the mass, and that He died for our sins. Still, they condemn us, who hold these doctrines, as heretics, and punish those of their subjects whom they discover believing our doctrine and using the Sacrament as it was instituted by Christ. This is willful persecution of the truth, and there-

fore not a sin of ignorance. They commit this sin in such a way that it cannot be forgiven them; for it is a sin that is in direct conflict with forgiveness, because it is neither abandoned nor confessed. Forgiveness of sin demands that sin be both confessed and renounced.

Other sinners sin ignorantly. But we must understand their case correctly. David, for instance, knew well enough that he was doing wrong and sinning against God in taking the wife of Uriah and then having him slain. But his carnal lust and the devil so impetuously impelled him to the deed that he committed it before rightly considering what he was doing. Afterward, however, he confessed his sin, was grieved by it, wished that he had not committed it, and prayed for mercy.

We all are encumbered with this sin and are easily and unawares led astray. Sometimes we fall through fear, sometimes through carelessness and weakness, like Peter, and sometimes through presumptuousness. Such sins Christ bore with Him to the cross and for such He prayed; for these are bare and naked sins, which are not inconsistent with grace, being recognized and confessed and their forgiveness being sought. Thus we often find that harlots, villains, murderers, and other wicked people, who know that they have done wrong and make no attempt at justifying themselves, find mercy. To the believer God does not impute such acknowledged sins, because the sacrifice of Christ is interposed between them and God. But they who knowingly and willfully persist in sin and even excuse their sins, sin against the Holy Ghost and deny the grace of God. For them Christ does

not pray here, but only for those who know not what they do, and who, as said before, fall through fear, weakness and the like. The latter can rely upon the offering and prayer of Christ and can be assured that their sins are forgiven, for Christ here prays for them, and His prayer was surely accepted. We must not doubt this, but find in it consolation and joy.

So much it was meet briefly to say concerning Christ's prayer on the cross, with which He declares why He is suffering there, namely, that they who sin ignorantly and then repent might, for His sake, have a merciful God, who does not impute to them, but graciously forgives, their sin.

Let us now look a little also at the history of the malefactor on the right of Christ. We can nowhere find an incident of more remarkable beauty than here. The poor fellow cannot deny his sins; he knows that he has sinned, and that he must now die for his sins. He cannot, therefore, boast before God of any good works, or of any merit of his own. He even reproves his comrade, who, railing on the Lord Jesus, said, "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us," by answering him thus: We are indeed justly punished, "for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss." He thus confesses that he had well deserved that dreadful death. It is a matter of astonishment, therefore, in the first place, that, having every reason to fear God on account of his sins, the malefactor still was confident, as we shall hear, that the Lord Jesus would take him with Him into His kingdom.

It is a matter of great astonishment, in the second place, that this one man did not stumble at the huge stumbling-stone laid in his way by the entire council of Jerusalem, including the temporal and spiritual government, which mocked and reviled the Lord Jesus. The chief spiritual rulers said: "He saved others, let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the Chosen of God." The soldiers also mocked Him, saying, "If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself;" for the superscription written over Him declared that He was "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The malefactor crucified on the left of Christ said: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." This he said, not because he desired help, but because he wanted to insult and ridicule the Lord. In short, the whole world is offended in Christ, who hangs on the cross, and it does not esteem Him. Even the disciples, although a part of them stood by the cross, had lost all hope.

The poor malefactor on the right alone steps over the rock of offence and dares to call Christ, who hangs on the cross at his side, a Lord and King. He gives the lie to all the world, cares not what others think of him, and proclaims Christ to be an everlasting King. These are his words: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." He calls Christ a Lord, says He has a kingdom, and desires Him, when He shall have entered His kingdom, to remember him. Now, the time rendered it certain, that neither of them could live till evening. Therefore he believes that Christ is the Lord of another and an eternal life. This faith and this confession, found, as it was, in

the midst of a world that despaired of Christ and hated Him, must have been indeed a great and exquisite faith,—a glorious confession.

The question may occur to us, whence could the malefactor have obtained this abundant and accurate knowledge, by which he was able to recognize and proclaim Christ as the Lord of eternal life, or who could have been his instructor? Without a doubt, he learned this alone from Christ's prayer on the cross. The prophet Isaiah, chap. 53, declares that the Messiah should suffer and be "numbered with the transgressors," and also that He should bear "the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors." This prophecy was fulfilled on the cross. The innocent Lord, who had done no evil, hangs there between two murderers. And as He begins to pray, and says, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," the malefactor catches the little word "Father." People were not in the habit of conversing with God in this way. Christ is the only One who can speak thus to God, and He it is who has taught us thus to speak. The malefactor hence concludes that Christ must be God's Son, and recognizes Him, by His praying for sinners, as the true Messiah, or Christ. The quoted passages from Isaiah, and similar passages from other prophets which he had heard, either in the temple at Jerusalem, or elsewhere in some synagogue, but which he had not understood, now, no doubt, occurred to him. He takes these passages together, and the Holy Spirit makes these prophecies so bright and clear to his soul that he can contain himself no longer, but confesses with his lips

what he believes in his heart, and says, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

He would say: Thou art the Son of God. For our sins Thou sufferest on earth this dreadful death upon the cross. But Thou shalt afterward ascend into an everlasting kingdom and be Lord over all. There, O Lord, remember me! I am willing now to die, for I have well deserved death. But do Thou not forget me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.—Behold, what a deep knowledge of Christ Jesus this man derived from Christ's short prayer! This prayer was the sermon that taught him true wisdom.

The knowledge and confession of Christ which proceeded from the malefactor on the cross, is the very same knowledge and confession by which God preserves the Christian Church to-day. Though everything else should fail, and emperors, kings, popes and bishops cease to be, God will still retain a small company that shall have His Spirit and that shall confess His name before the world. When the disciples, and others who are closely allied to the Lord Jesus, refuse to confess and believe, and deny the Lord through fear, and are offended in Him and desert Him, then some malefactor or murderer must appear, to confess this Christ, to preach concerning Him, and to teach others what they should think of Him and why they should be comforted in Him. The Lord our God is determined not to leave Christ without followers who confess Him, even if He must have recourse to the thief upon the gallows, or the murderer upon the wheel.

This is, therefore, a consoling history; for it teaches us, first of all, that they who follow Christ and receive all mercy from Him, are none other than those sinners who confess their sins and heartily pray for grace; these shall receive grace and mercy. With His previous prayer, "Father, forgive them," &c., His present action corresponds; He suffers now, that sin may be forgiven. And then, upon the cross, before He dies, the dear Lord soon proves, in the case of the malefactor, or murderer, how beneficial and powerful His sufferings are and what they avail. He there proves that His sufferings benefit all poor sinners who, with the malefactor, believe and confess that Christ is an eternal King; that by His agony, death and resurrection He has acquired for them the forgiveness of their sins and their deliverance from everlasting death; and that He will take them into His eternal kingdom.

Hence we can conclude with such certainty as not to entertain the vestige of a doubt, that Christ did not offer Himself on the cross for saints, for no mortal, let him be who he may, is holy of himself; but that He offered Himself for sinners, for He came to call sinners to repentance and not the righteous, as He Himself says, Matt. 9. Therefore, he who tries to get to heaven by means of a holy life, good works, and personal merits, deceives himself. He who does not confess himself a sinner, can find no access to the Lord Jesus; for Christ did not die for His own, but for the sinner's sake.

Christ converted the malefactor on the cross into a saint, not suffering him to remain and to perish in his sins. We should therefore regard this his-

tory as an example showing by very deed what the Redeemer sought and acquired by His sufferings, and what He accomplished by the priestly sacrifice and prayer which He offered on the cross. He took sin upon Himself, not because He delights in sin, neither because He would have us remain under sin and continue in iniquity. No, He suffers for sinners so that they need not go on in sin, and so that they may become converted and be pious and holy. This His purpose was accomplished in the case of the malefactor, who, being converted, accused himself of sin, but still trusted in the Lord Jesus, believing that God, through Him and for His sake, would forgive his sins and give him life eternal.

The malefactor is thus made an entirely different man. His shameful and justly merited death now becomes a real act of divine service. He suffers no longer as a murderer, but as a saint. He dies in the true confession and in heart-felt confidence in God's grace through Christ. He is sincerely grieved for his sins. He now begins to obey God and to do many good works. With his sufferings he honors and praises God. Publicly, before all the world, he glorifies the crucified Jesus, exhorting and admonishing every one to repent and to believe in this Lord. In short, his faith in Christ does not only cause him to be a saint, but it even bears him into paradise and into everlasting life, according to Christ's promise: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Let us follow this example and not act like the rude and ungodly, who say: I will sin so that Christ may have a chance to save me and to show

me mercy. No, no; but let us say: I am born in sin and am full of filth and evil lusts. It is, therefore, not necessary for me first to sin in order to be able to confess myself a sinner. I have, alas, been only too great a sinner from the very beginning! I am already under the curse of God and condemned to eternal death. Therefore, since God in infinite compassion calls me to repentance, will I now turn myself unto Him and take refuge in this Lord, whose suffering has ransomed sinners, and whose innocent death has delivered me from the death so well deserved and long since merited, and who has reconciled me unto God!

He, however, who abuses this sermon of mercy, and refuses to forsake and confess and repent of his sins, may look upon the murderer on the left of Christ and upon the rulers of the Jews and upon the soldiers, and consider how they fared in their wickedness and what they merited with their impenitent lives. If we would be benefited by the Lord Jesus and by His agony and prayer, we must follow the example of the malefactor who confessed his sins and prayed for grace, and acknowledged that Christ was the Lord and the King of everlasting life. May the dear Lord Jesus, our eternal King, grant us this. Amen.

TWELFTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST COMMITS HIS MOTHER TO THE CARE OF JOHN.—

THE SOLDIERS DO NOT BREAK THE LEGS OF CHRIST,
BUT WITH A SPEAR PIERCE HIS SIDE, FROM
WHICH BLOOD AND WATER FLOW.

JOHN 19, 25-37. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him whom they pierced.

St. John, toward the end of the passion history, relates three things, about which the other Evangelists do not write, but which are, nevertheless, very important in point of doctrine and consolation. These also must be considered, that we may have the whole of this history before us.

The first of these things is, that Christ, while on the cross, commends His mother to John, and also John to His mother, so that they might be inclined toward each other as are a mother and her son, and that they might love and in every way assist each other. John tells us too that he immediately took the mother of Jesus into his care and treated her as if she had been his own mother.

This narrative is generally regarded as an illustration of the fourth commandment, which says: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." With this accords the fact that John lived longer than the rest of the Apostles, namely, sixty-eight years after the resurrection. Although this explanation is not improper as far as it goes, it is still too narrow; for that which the Lord does and says here upon the cross dare not be regarded as done and said for only a few individuals. Christ intended His works and words to embrace the whole world, but especially the Christian Church.

That, therefore, which Christ here says to Mary and John alone, we must regard as a command for all Christians and for the entire Church. Since Christ hangs upon the cross and, by His death, saves us all from sin and death, we must be toward each other like a mother and her son, who in all things sincerely love, aid and advise each other. This is the meaning also of the command which the Lord so often repeats during the last Supper: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;" "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." The love between a mother and

her children is the deepest and most sincere that can be found.

The Lord uses the words "mother" and "son" with special reference to both parts of the Church, viz., to those who teach the Word and to those who hear. Even as a mother nourishes her infant and diligently cares for it till it is grown up and has become strong, so honest pastors also labor and take pains to teach the people and render them good Christians. Thus Paul calls his disciples, whom he had reared as with a mother's trouble and toil, children, 1 Cor. 4; Gal. 4; 1 Thess. 2. The Church cannot be properly conducted unless they who exercise the office of the ministry have for her the affection of a mother. If they have not this love, the result will be indolence, indifference and unwillingness to suffer. The Lord very explicitly teaches this in the 21. chapter of John. He there commands Peter to preach, but not until He had three times asked him: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" By this question He meant to say: Unless thou lovest the lambs as a mother loves her children, whom she tries to rescue from the flames even at the peril of her own life, thou wilt never be fit for a preacher. In thy office as pastor, trouble, toil, ingratitude, hatred, envy and many a cross will be thy lot. Now, if the pastors have no motherly heart, no fervent love for the flock, these shall receive poor care indeed.

On the other hand, again, they who have not received the command to preach, but stand in need of information and instruction, must deport themselves like sons, suffering themselves to be taught, led, nourished, and cared for in other ways, thus

conducting themselves toward their teachers as a pious child conducts itself toward its mother. True, children's love for their mother is not as great as the mother's love for her children, even as the proverb says: *Amor descendit, non ascendit*, that is, love moves downward, not upward. Still, nature prompts pious children to honor their parents, and to serve them and yield to them in everything that they desire and need. When this is the relation between mother and son, between pastor and congregation, then all is well.

If, however, the ministers of the Church are lacking in motherly affection, or if the hearers are void of childlike fidelity, it is out of the question that things should go right and that God should be pleased. This we have sadly experienced in the case of the Pope, the bishops and the whole priestly rabble, for they have no such motherly love. They think that the office was given them merely that they might be great lords and live at their ease. Therefore, they not only take poor care of the sheep, but they even, to their heart's content, skin and butcher the lambs in life, property and soul, as we only too well see. Again, we frequently find the deficiency in the hearers, that they, like ill-bred children, do not properly provide for their pastors. This is the case, among us, with peasants, with citizens, and especially with the nobility, who deal so closely, stingily and niggardly with their pastors, that seldom one is found who willingly gives to the ministry as much as he should. And this is done in spite of St. Paul's pointed and earnest admonition, not to communicate sparingly of our carnal things unto them that communicate unto us spirit-

ual things. Such ingratitude cannot fail to injure the cause of the Gospel, neither can God's punishment fail to come upon such perverse children.

We should, therefore, carefully observe and take to heart this command of our Lord Jesus, who, upon the cross, shows such tender solicitude both for the teacher and the disciple, that is, for the whole Church. Teachers and pastors He exhorts to motherly love, and pulpits and congregations to childlike faithfulness, gratitude and obedience. If both parties obey these blessed instructions of our dear Lord Jesus, all will be well and God will bless and give success. So much for the first point.

The other two points, that no bone of Christ was broken and that His side was pierced with a spear, do not appear to be of much importance. Since, however, the Evangelist John adduces the clear testimony of the Scriptures, that Moses and Zechariah had prophesied these things many centuries before they took place, and since the Holy Spirit speaks nothing that is useless or vain, we are bound to confess that these two facts are of great moment, however much they may have the appearance of trifles. The holy Evangelist John, according to true apostolic custom, confers on us a special blessing by everywhere quoting and interpreting Scripture so appropriately.

Moses, as we have already heard, wrote the clear command that no one should "remain all night upon the tree," for God had said that this would defile the land. As this was the day for the preparation, and as the Sabbath would begin with the setting of the sun, the Jews besought Pilate to have the bodies removed from the cross, so that

they might be buried yet by day, before the beginning of the festival. Pilate gave his consent. But as they found the two malefactors yet living, the soldiers, as John says, hastened their departure, at the command of the Jews, by breaking their arms and legs, as they were hanging on the cross. They intended to do the same with the Lord Jesus, but He gave up the ghost before they had finished with the two malefactors, and therefore "they brake not His legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side," from which, to the astonishment of all, both blood and water flowed. These two things, as I have said, seem of little importance, but John testifies that they were not mere accidents, but that both of them had been foretold, the one by Moses, "Neither shall ye break a bone," the other by Zechariah, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced."

Now, it is true, indeed, that what Moses says, Ex. 12 and Num. 9, refers to the passover. How, then, could it occur to the Evangelist John to say: "These things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken," and what does he mean by this? He would simply teach us to look upon the Lord Jesus on the cross as the true Passover, of which the old passover in the law is merely the type or symbol.

When God desired with violence to weaken the might of Pharaoh in Egypt and to frustrate his obstinate wantonness and design, and to save His people Israel, He commanded His people, the Jews, in each house, in the appointed night, to slay a lamb of the first year and roast and eat it, but to

strike its blood on the door-posts. The destroying angel was to pass over that house on whose doors he should see the token of the blood and smite none of its inmates. But where the token of the lamb's blood on the door was wanting, there the angel was in that night to smite throughout all Egypt the first-born both of man and beast. As Moses had told the people at God's command, so it came to pass. In the morning dead men and beasts were found in the houses of all the Egyptians, the destroyer having spared the Jews alone, because their doors were marked and protected by the blood of the lamb.

Let us now turn to our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus. He desires to punish Pharaoh and all Egypt, that is, sin, death and Satan, and to rescue His Christian Church from tyranny. Therefore He suffers Himself to be slain like the lamb of old, and to be sacrificed upon the cross, so that He might sprinkle us with His blood, and so that the destroying angel, who, on account of our sins, had brought death upon us, and had received power over us, might pass over us and do us no harm. Paul, 1 Cor. 5, refers to this so beautifully: "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," that we might be partakers of His blood, and that Satan, death and sin might have no authority over us and no power to do us hurt. This it is that John wishes us to learn here from his statement that Christ, like the paschal lamb, had no bone broken.

We would, however, consider here also the other particulars which the Jews had to observe with reference to the passover, so that when we see how perfectly the passover harmonizes with Christ, we

may find more consolation in this sacrifice made for us, and take greater interest in the Lord Jesus.

The lamb was required to be without blemish, a male of the first year, healthy and strong; no other lamb would have answered the purposes of the passover. Now, as lambs one year old are very prolific, so this Lamb, the Lord Jesus, brought forth and built up His Church. The Lord Jesus is also without all blemish and deficiency, for He is the Son of God, and His flesh and blood is not sinful like ours, but He is holy altogether.

The Jews were directed to take the lamb from the sheep, or from the goats, on the tenth day of the month, and to keep it by itself until the fourteenth day of the month. In this way Christ was taken from the fold of God, that is, from the Jews, who were God's people, and for this reason He is called the Son of Abraham, or of David. He was separated for the special office of preaching God's kingdom among His people, the Jews, during the four years preceding His passion.

That the lamb had to be eaten in the evening, indicates that Christ should come in the latter times, when the Jews were no longer to be the people of God, and when the law and ceremonies of Moses were to cease. It is for this reason that the Lord sometimes compared His Gospel to a supper, and that the Apostles called the days of the New Testament "the latter times" and "the last days."

The lamb dared not to be eaten sodden or raw, but roasted. Throughout all Scripture, fire is an emblem of suffering and affliction. The lamb roasted with fire is, therefore, a type of Christ, who

suffered death upon the cross. We dare not partake of Him raw, that is, he who would receive Him at all, dare not be careless, secure and profane as our Epicureans are, who think that they can believe and do as they please, and still be good Christians. These do not partake of the lamb properly, and cannot do so any more than they can who eat it sodden with water, that is, they who do not keep the doctrine pure, but adulterate it with human teachings and traditions, as the Pope does.

Unleavened bread and bitter herbs had to be eaten with the lamb. Thus Paul says: "Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven," refusing to check sin and to amend our conduct; "neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness," dealing in hypocrisy and not heartily repenting; "but with the unleavened bread of sincerity," keeping a clear conscience and living in the fear of God; "and truth," sincerely, not hypocritically, asking God's blessing and earnestly desiring to regulate ourselves according to His Word. This is the unleavened bread.

The herbs signify the holy cross; for, as Paul says: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

No part of the lamb was allowed to remain, but the whole of it had to be eaten, or else that which remained was to be burned with fire. Neither should a bone of it be broken. Just so it is with Christ. He who would be a true Christian dares not eat one part and leave another part uneaten. He must accept and believe everything that Christ says, and must not, like the fanatics and sects, eat His words piecemeal. Arius was satisfied with

everything else, only he would not believe that Christ was eternal God. The Anabaptists reject the baptism of children, despise this, the original institution, and fancy that they have found a better. The Sacramentarians of the present day accept everything Christ says, and think themselves excellent Christians. But it is not to their liking that Christ said, when He took the bread, "Take, eat; this is my body," and when He took the cup, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the New Testament," and this they do not want to believe. They do not like the taste of this and so they leave it uneaten, in spite of God's command that the whole of this Paschal Lamb should be eaten, or else the remainder burned with fire. And more than this, they even break the bones, that is, torture, crucify and mangle at pleasure the Word of the Lord Jesus, only so that they may give their scandalous error some plausibility. Thus we find that the Pope, the Anabaptists, the Sacramentarians and, in short, all the sects, eat only that part of the lamb that suits their taste, and let the parts that they do not relish remain, and break them to pieces.

What must be done with the blood has already been related, viz., the blood of the Lamb is to prevent sin, death and hell from hurting us, and, for all time to come, to hinder Pharaoh and the Egyptians, that is, Satan and the world, from oppressing and subduing us. Christ was sacrificed that He might make us free, John 8, and undo and destroy the work of Satan.

Of all this John would remind us when he says: "These things were done that the Scripture should

be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken." He wishes us to regard the passover as the faithful picture of the entire benefit and of the real fruit of our Lord Jesus' sufferings. He wishes us to see that Christ was sacrificed for us and that His blood is to deliver us from sin, death and the devil, which constantly oppress, alarm and coerce us in the same way in which Pharaoh retained and vexed the children of Israel in Egypt. The blood of our Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus, has abolished this servitude. We now have peace, and, fully free from every burden, we shall pass from dangerous Egypt over to the land of promise and to life eternal.

We shall now consider the third point, which the Evangelist evidently regarded as very important. He not only introduces the testimony of the Prophet Zechariah, who had prophesied concerning this piercing of Christ's side; but he also uses many and solemn words to affirm the miracle, that blood and water flowed from the dead body. This was unnatural, because when a man is dead his blood is cold and does not flow; and it was still more unnatural for both blood and water to flow from a corpse. Therefore John says: "He that saw it bare record, . . . and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." He thus calls our attention to this miracle as one of great importance, so that we might diligently study it and finally learn from it to believe; that is, that we might through Christ and His death, as was said above when speaking of the passover, have the hope of the forgiveness of sins and of everlasting life. This is the chief design of this narrative as given by the

Evangelist, with whom, as we shall soon see, the prophet completely corresponds.

First of all, however, let us rid ourselves of the idea that it was merely a casual circumstance that one of the soldiers thrust his spear into the corpse's side. The soldier, of course, did this in ignorance of any exalted signification the act might have. Still it was done by God's special arrangement, else the Holy Spirit would not have prophesied concerning it through Zechariah so many centuries before. We see that the Lord retained the wounds in His body after the resurrection, and that He showed them to His disciples in particular as a mark by which they might recognize Him. This piercing of Christ's side and this gushing forth of blood and water were not, therefore, mere accidents, but they were intended to mean and to accomplish something.

We must here be on our guard, lest we imitate the example commonly set by rude people, who say: It is none of my business what flowed from the Lord Jesus' side; it is enough for me to know that He died on the cross. Let us not think in this way, but let us honor the Holy Ghost and contribute to our own comfort by carefully learning what was accomplished by this piercing of Christ's side with the spear, which John so faithfully relates and which Zechariah had foretold so long before.

In the first place, it is certain beyond all dispute, that it is unnatural for a deceased body to sweat or bleed. As soon as blood grows cold it no longer flows, but it stagnates. The dead body before us now, however, is different from all other dead

bodies, and hence things take place in it that do not take place in any other body. True, Christ's body was flesh and blood like our own, and it died as ours must die. Yet, His flesh and blood were sinless, and therefore He died in such a way that even in His death a sign of life remained. The blood in all other bodies is soon cold and stagnant, but in the body of the Lord Jesus it remains so warm and active that, as soon as His side is pierced, it rushes forth as from a living body's opened vein. John wishes us to observe this carefully, and to learn from it that it is the true nature of the blood of our dear Lord Jesus to flow and live and be efficacious even after He has died. Neither was the blood of the paschal lamb used while the lamb lived, but after it was dead and had been eaten. The angel went by night through Egypt and smote all the first-born, but the houses of the Jews which were marked with the blood of the lamb he spared, and in them smote none. And thus the blood of our dear Lord Jesus continues still to live and flow, having neither become stagnant nor grown cold. It flows and gushes after He is dead, and all who are sprinkled with it have the forgiveness of sin and are children of eternal life.

We should mark this well, for this unnatural flowing shows that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus, as that of the true Paschal Lamb, retained its influence and power and virtue even after Christ's death; that it should flow upon, sprinkle and mark the faithful standing by the cross; and that Satan, death and sin should let alone all upon whom they find this mark, and not have power to hurt them. Such is the true nature, power and virtue of the

blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and such it forever remains in His Church even after His death.

Besides the blood, however, water also came out of Christ's side. This, no doubt, was to serve as an indication that the blood of Christ would sprinkle only those who were baptized in His name. Our Lord Jesus Himself says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Blood and water go together. Where Christ's blood is and operates, there the water of blessed Baptism also is; but where the water does not flow, that is, where there is no holy Baptism, there the blood of Christ is also wanting, nor does it flow there nor sprinkle any one, as it is the case among the Turks and Jews and heathen. Evermore must blood and water flow on together, and neither be separated from the other.

We must mark this well, for it has great value. It is not of great import for those who died under the Old Testament and who did not live to see Baptism; for they had their own Baptism and were saved by faith in the blessed Seed. Nor is it so important on account of infants who die in their mother's womb before they can be brought to Baptism; for their parents and the Christian assistants of those in travail bring to Christ the offering of fervent prayer in the hour of danger, and they are, without a doubt, accepted graciously. But the value of this token of mercy is our own, and we should not despise it and not prevent ourselves nor our families from accepting it. Where the water of this Baptism is, there too must be the blood of Christ, for water and blood come from His side

together; and we have already seen the value of this blood, viz., it defends us against the destroying angel, cleanses us from sin, and causes us to live forever. The prophet, in such perfect harmony with the Evangelist, beautifully indicates this in Zech. 12, where he says: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

It cannot be denied, in the first place, that the prophet here speaks of the time of the New Testament and of the grace which should come upon us through the death of Christ. This grace, moreover, consists in God's pouring upon us "the Spirit of grace and of supplication," that is, God, through His Holy Spirit, brings comfort to our souls, so that we trust in His mercy and compassion through Christ, and call upon Him in every time of need, and seek help from Him, as children seek help from their father.

In the second place, John here throws upon us the light of his true apostolic spirit, when he says that the piercing, of which the prophet proceeds to speak, was done on the occasion of the crucifixion. The prophet tells us what shall be the result of this piercing, in these words: "They," mark you, they who have the Spirit of grace and of supplications,—"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his

first-born. This mourning and this bitterness mean nothing else than the thorough recognition of the sins for whose sake Christ suffered on the cross. Our looking upon Him who is pierced and our mourning for Him and our being sorrowful, indicates that He is innocent and that He suffered all for us.

His suffering thus, however, causes us to perceive our danger and distress, to desist from carelessly participating with the world in sin, to deplore our sinful heart and wicked life, to ask God for forgiveness, and to cling to the sufferings of Christ and console ourselves with them because He, being holy and obedient, did not deserve to die, but still took upon Himself and suffered death because He loved us so unspeakably.

It is necessary for us that we should pity, mourn and lament in the way stated above, and it is necessary for Christ to have our sympathy, grief and tears, or else He can have no Christian Church. The Church alone, as Zechariah says, looks upon the wounded Christ and weeps for Him, but not like the women at Jerusalem, for they wept for Christ in such a way as to overlook themselves. The tears of the believers, of the Christian Church, flow because the sins are seen within them, for which Christ suffered death. Thus the prophet plainly points out to us the fruits of Christ's sufferings. And soon after, in the 13. chapter, he says: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

How closely the prophet unites the spear-thrust and the fountain, that is, the blood and the water,

or holy Baptism. Now, if we would interpret this narrative correctly, we must say: Blood flows from the Lord Jesus' side for the washing away and forgiveness of my sins. The Lord Himself testifies to this when He takes the cup in the Holy Supper. But water also comes forth to show that His body is an open fountain. But why is it such? "For sin and for uncleanness." Baptism applies to us the blood of our Lord Jesus, for which reason Paul expresses this by saying, we are baptized into Christ's death, that is, we are baptized that the death of Christ might be our own and for our good, so that, being delivered from sin and death, we might live forever.

The holy fathers say some beautiful things about this. Augustine says that John uses the word "pierced,"—"One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side,"—to show that the door of life was thus thrown open as it were, through which door came to us the holy Sacraments of the Church, without which Sacraments it is impossible to enter into that life which is the real life. He speaks of Sacraments, in the plural, because he refers not only to Baptism, which is represented by the water, but also to the Holy Supper, in which we drink Christ's blood. Chrysostom speaks after the same manner, saying: Whereas the sacred Mysteries here take their origin, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast about to drink from the Lord Jesus' side.

The Sacramentarians dare not quote this passage of Chrysostom, for they boast that the whole of the old Church believed as they do, viz., that in the Lord's Supper there are only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of Christ. Now, how does

this boast harmonize with the words of Chrysostom? They surely cannot be so blind and frantic as to say that wine flowed from Christ's side, and yet they say that in the Holy Supper we do not drink the blood of Christ, but merely wine. They must admit, on the testimony of Chrysostom, who says, thou must approach the holy Cup as if thou wast about to drink from Christ's side, that the ancient Church discerned not only wine, but also blood, in the Sacrament of the altar.

It is this flowing of both water and blood from Christ's side, that is said to have given rise to the custom of mixing the wine used in the Supper of the Lord with water. Cyprian vigorously defends this custom as a special ordinance of Christ, and the Armenians were condemned as heretics for not complying with it. Since Christ, however, did not command this to be done, and since the words of the institution tell us merely that Christ took the cup and gave it to His disciples, it is not necessary to hold this custom as essential.

We therefore let this matter rest and confine ourselves to the doctrine taught us by the holy Evangelist, which is, that the blood of our dear Lord Jesus Christ shall forever retain its power and efficacy after Christ's death, and shall preserve us from death and sin, provided we are baptized with water as Christ commanded. In Baptism we find the blood of Christ in reality, even as blood and water flow together here. Where the blood is, there is the water also, and where the water is, there also is the blood, and it accomplishes its purpose, which is to wash away our sins and to make us perfectly clean, even as Zechariah says when he

prophecies concerning the open fountain "for sin and for uncleanness."

We should, therefore, thank God for the ineffable mercy and compassion, by which He has led us to this fountain, to be baptized in the name of His Son, and thus to be cleansed from our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. We may now hope, through the Spirit of grace, to receive from God all good things, and can now call upon God in every hour of need, through the Spirit of supplications. And the final blessing of Christ's death shall come upon us in the end, when we leave this world of sorrows and enter life eternal. May God bestow this upon every one of us. Amen.

THIRTEENTH PASSION-SERMON.

CHRIST'S BODY TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND LAID IN A TOMB.—THE SOLDIERS GUARD THE TOMB.

MATT. 27, 57-63. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

The concluding events related in the history of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus are His removal from the cross, His being laid in a new tomb, and the guarding of the tomb by the soldiers. And a most appropriate conclusion this is; for it shows how the death of our dear Lord Jesus influences both His friends and His enemies. His enemies become uneasy and apprehensive, and they perceptibly sink deeper into sin. They, however, who honestly love the Lord Jesus, are made confident and bold by the death of Christ, notwithstanding their weakness and timidity, and now venture to do what before they would not have thought of

doing. The death of our dear Lord Jesus has just the same effect on men in our day, as we shall soon hear.

The shameful death of Christ upon the cross was indeed a most severe offence. Hence His foes blaspheme Him to the utmost, while His disciples, who had been about Him, did not dare to show themselves, and had no other thought than that all was over with Him now. His mother, the dear Virgin Mary, stood there distressed and full of sorrow, and other women with her. Now, although she closely kept in her heart the saying of the angel, and pondered the prophecies spoken by pious and holy people, such as the aged Simeon and Anna, a prophetess, when Jesus was yet a child, Luke 2, her affliction still overwhelmed her so and the offence so wounded her heart, that she could not speak. Thus the small assembly that had hitherto adhered to Christ and kept Him company is perfectly mute. The condemned malefactor is the only one who moves or speaks. Christ's enemies carry the day and are full of hope and gladness. The clamor made is all their own, the rest must hold their peace.

The weakness and timidity of these pious people serves, as said above, to teach us not to be rash and not to place too much reliance in ourselves. If these almost lose sight of comfort and are swallowed up, as it were, by grief and misery, how much more shall not we be subject to such weakness when called upon to expose ourselves or to suffer for the Gospel's sake. How very necessary, therefore, that we should abide in the fear of God and pray for the Holy Spirit, that He may enlighten and comfort

our hearts, and make us bold enough to dare and to bear something for the glory of God and for the sake of His Word.

When the offence was at its very height, and when they who had been the best Christians and had fearlessly clung to the Lord Jesus began to falter and to shrink, and, on account of fear, sorrow and gloom, knew not what to do nor whither to go, the first to approach was Joseph of Arimathea, a city which is also called Arumah, Joshua 15 and Judges 9. Joseph was not a plain and common citizen, like the Apostles, who were simply common people, but he was a member of the council of Jerusalem and very rich. He it was who ventured to go to Pilate and beg for the dead body, that he might take it down from the cross and bury it. And then came also Nicodemus, who, although he loved the Lord and His Word, had been so timorous that he came to Him only by night. He brought about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, so that the Lord might not be buried meanly, but with honor. It was customary among the Jews, as John relates, because they had derived from the Word of God the hope of the resurrection and of everlasting life, to give the bodies of the deceased a decent burial by preparing them with myrrh and aloes, so that they would not only be preserved for a long time and decay slowly, but also that they would have an agreeable odor.

Mark and Luke specially mention that Joseph was a disciple of Christ, that is, he attentively and approvingly heard Christ preach, and waited for the kingdom of God. We must carefully bear this in mind, for from this we learn what prompted him

to have the boldness to go to Pilate, which was not a trifling matter.

The chief priests and the entire council at Jerusalem had accused the Lord Jesus as a perverter of the nation, as a deceiver and blasphemer, and on this accusation Pilate based his judgment. Now, Joseph, who had taken no part in any of the proceedings against the Lord Jesus and did not want to be present at His trial, did a very dangerous thing when he sought Christ's body for a decent burial. He was thus likely to incur the fury of the whole council and of Pilate himself, who had condemned the Lord, and he thus gave them to understand that in his opinion Christ had been a pious and a good Man, who had been wronged in the sight of God and the world.

What moved him so boldly to expose himself? Only this, he was waiting for the kingdom of God. That is, he still believed that God's kingdom would not fail to come, and that Christ, although He had so miserably hung and died upon the cross, would be raised from the dead by God, and that He would accomplish and furnish everything necessary to fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah and his kingdom. If the centurion who stood over against Him and saw Christ die when He had cried with a loud voice, learned so much from various occurrences, such as the darkness and the earthquake, that he openly confessed: "Truly this Man was the Son of God," how much more would not this Joseph and pious Nicodemus also have had such thoughts! Without a doubt, the preaching of the prophets, and the words of Christ which they had repeatedly heard and which they had

now, through the admonition of the Holy Spirit, taken to heart for the first time, conveyed to them the hope that Christ had not been finally disposed of, but that God would establish His kingdom now when men least looked for it. Christ had, for instance, preached to Nicodemus a powerful sermon on this hope, telling him, John 3, that as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness so He also would be lifted up on the cross.

The Holy Spirit, at that time, kindled such thoughts in their weak and timid hearts, which soon influenced them so that Joseph goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Him whom Pilate had condemned as a disturber and blasphemer. Nicodemus brings myrrh and aloes, with which to give the Lord a costly and decent burial, as their testimony before all the world that they yet hoped that God's kingdom still would come, although defied by Jerusalem's haughtiest boast that Christ was gone and things would soon be changed.

Such is the fruit of our dear Lord Jesus' death. The weakest and most diffident distinguish themselves by boldly and fearlessly confessing Christ and by asking for His body, which hangs in the greatest disgrace, that they might bury it with the greatest honor. They thus testify that they, in spite of Jews, chief priests, Pilate, and all foes of Christ, regard and glorify Christ as the Son of God, hope for His kingdom, and find comfort in Him even now when He is dead and when every body thinks that He is gone forever. This is exactly as Mark and Luke say: Joseph "waited for the kingdom of God," that is, he hoped that God, through this Man, would found a new kingdom on

the earth, forgive sins, and impart the Holy Spirit and eternal life. For, according to the prophets, the great, essential feature of God's kingdom is, that Christ, or the Messiah, must establish it.

Isaiah's prophecy concerning Christ, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench," is here fulfilled in the case of Joseph and Nicodemus. Hitherto they were weak and timid Christians. They suffered much from their fear, which prevented them from making an open confession. It is for this reason that John speaks of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, as a secret disciple. Christ forgave them this fear, and did not cast them away on account of it. Now, however, when the danger is greatest and when they who usually were such strong and bold Christians are overcome by the offence, and fear to let themselves be seen, the Holy Spirit, through the death of Christ, fans the smoking and nearly smothered flax until it makes a blaze as bright as the beautiful sun. What Joseph had so far been thinking and believing of Christ in secret, he now makes known to all, fearing neither the Jews nor Pilate. He cares more for Christ, who died in the deepest disgrace, than for all the world. Let us not regard this as insignificant, or as a mere result of Christ's sufferings. These things are written as examples for us all, that we should imitate Joseph and Nicodemus. When Christ hangs on the cross, that is, when the Gospel is persecuted and poor Christians are tortured for its sake, we should stand forth, and, not heeding the tyrant's wrath, glorify God's Son and His Word, and honor it by publicly confessing it until Christ who died shall

appear in His glorious resurrection, when faint-hearted, timid, and fearful Christians also shall receive comfort and return to the confession.

Such changes shall always occur in the Church. Some are offended and fall back, and generally the strongest grow weak when affliction comes, while the weakest advance and let their joyful confession be heard, so that there are always some who acknowledge and confess Christ. Whether it is unwillingness or inability that keeps the strong from doing this, on account of the offence, the very weakest, who make no display at all, must do it for them, and the former then learn and experience the utter nothingness of men when God removes His Spirit from them. God, as a rich House-holder, wants all kinds of servants in His house; not only such as are strong and full grown, but also such as are weak and small. That the strong may not despise the rest, they have occasion given them to see weakness in themselves; and that no one may judge his fellow, God's Spirit comes upon the weak, admonishing, comforting and strengthening them in such measure that all must see and praise God's power in them. The sufferings of our dear Lord Jesus operate thus in His Church forever, in order that it may not go to ruin, but stand and grow and expand.

What, however, is the effect on those who hate the Lord Jesus, and who have no peace until they have crucified Him? Just the reverse. The effect of Christ's death can be compared to the effect of the sun, which is different on different materials. Wax is softened and melted by the sun, while mud is made hard and dry. Pious hearts are made so

cheerful and bold by the sufferings of Christ, that they venture to do what they would by no means have attempted while Christ yet lived.

The godless Jews hurried Christ off to death in the hope that, when He should have been silenced, their cares would forever be gone. But when their malice was gratified in seeing that Christ had died upon the cross and was laid into a new tomb, they begin to be uneasy, and they all go to Pilate and say:

“Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.”

If we carefully notice these words we shall find what kind of hearts these people had. They remembered Christ's sayings well enough and understood them too, but what fruit did His sayings bring forth in them? Joseph and Nicodemus, who, no doubt, also remembered these words and comforted themselves with them at the time they were spoken, are now made courageous and joyful by them, and hope for every blessing. But these knaves grow restless, and begin to get scared at the dead Man, however natural it may otherwise be for men not to fear an enemy after they know him to be dead. The wicked Jews enjoy no such composure, but, as we see, they fear the departed Christ, who is lying in the tomb.

Before Pilate they pretended that His disciples might steal Him away and say that He is risen;

but in their hearts the words of the Lord Jesus are such a pricking and piercing thorn that they anxiously ask themselves: What if they were true after all? What if He should be the Messiah and rise again from the dead? What would become of us then?—This disturbs and disheartens them. But they are none the better for these thoughts. They do not argue thus: Alas, what have we done! Let us yet creep to the cross and not despise the excellent admonitions and miracles which came to light at His death.—No, they do not want to think in this way. They persist in that hatred and enmity with which they persecuted the Lord Jesus. They perceptibly grow worse and more wicked still. They devise all possible means and ways for annihilating the Lord Jesus and for diminishing His glory.

This too was written as an example and warning for us, that, when we see similar things done by the enemies of the Word, we may not become frightened. God's inevitable rule is this: the longer a man willfully opposes the Word, the deeper he must sink into sin, and the longer he seeks rest, the greater shall grow his restlessness and fear. It was just so too in the case of the blood of the Lord Jesus, of which we heard above. The Jews thought it a very little thing that they nailed Christ to the cross and slew Him. In a deliberate, careless and trifling spirit they say: "His blood be on us, and on our children." They afterward found what a little thing it was, alas, for Jerusalem and the whole land to be ruined on account of this. Here the case is exactly as it was there. They thought: If only this Jesus were out of the way once, we should not be troubled any more. Now, in the 2. chapter

of Acts it is written that Christ was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" into the shameful death upon the cross. This only increased the fears of the Jews, so that they had less peace than before. The words of Christ, although they did not believe them, still lay in their hearts like a burning fire, or a gnawing worm. While they could not believe them, they still could not altogether set them aside. So it must always be with the foci of the Word. The more they seek peace by means of tyranny, the deeper they fall, not only into trouble, but also into sin.

Although their plans may be laid in the greatest wisdom, they shall find in the end that they have only injured their cause, and aided the Gospel in spite of themselves, just as it was with the Jews. These demanded guards of Pilate, who should make the sepulchre sure until the third day. "Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can." Matthew says, "They went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." This they did to prevent the disciples from stealing the body of the Lord Jesus and from telling the people that Christ was risen from the dead. It was very wisely schemed, but how did it succeed? Their very fears were realized. When, early on Easter morning, Christ had risen from the dead, and the angel descended from heaven and came to the sepulchre and rolled back the stone from the door, and a great earthquake came, the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. As soon as they had recovered from the shock, they gathered themselves up, one ran this way, another that, and came to Jeru-

salem, where they told the chief priests all the things that were done. What, think you, must then have been the thoughts of these priests? How must their hearts not have quaked and trembled! They could not look on it as a jest, for there stood their own witnesses, the soldiers of Pilate, whom Pilate himself had sent to guard the tomb. These not only told them, but also showed in their entire conduct, what had happened. So severe a fright as theirs had been, is not so easily concealed. The speech betrays it; the countenance shows it; the whole body is so affected by it, as to make it known. It is, therefore, easily seen that this message must have terribly frightened the chief priests and elders.

Instead, however, of being bettered by this message, they only rushed deeper into sin and made their evil conscience worse. They held a council on that very Sabbath day, and gave much money to the soldiers that they might help them lie, and instructed them to say, "His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept." In this way these poor fellows sought to console and help themselves. They believed in their hearts that Christ, whom they had delivered to die, though innocent, had risen from the dead. Each one can imagine for himself how this must have troubled them; for, under such circumstances, their hearts could never have been calm. And yet, they gave much money to have their lies spread, and to have people persuaded to believe what they themselves did not believe. They who thus willfully resist the truth, and adorn and comfort themselves with known falsehoods, are surely spiteful and desperate wretches, We should learn this, so that

we may know how to look upon the foes of the Word. He who resists the truth, as has been said already, has only falsehood left to shield him.

In the meanwhile our dear Lord Jesus comforts His few scattered followers, and shows Himself to them, and proves to them by very deed that He is not dead, but living, and living as the Conqueror of death forever. The lies of those who hate the Word only help so much the more to spread the tidings and to give them notoriety. Had the Jews not guarded the tomb themselves, the falsehood, that Christ's body had been stolen, would have been more plausible; but it does not serve its purpose; for the guards had been stationed around the tomb, and the door of the sepulchre had been carefully sealed. The very fact of their fleeing sufficiently shows that a higher and greater power than that of Pilate and his guards was present.

So it always is with the enemies of the Gospel. They must resort to base and blasphemous lies, which, however, do not harm the Word, but further it in spite of them. This should move every one to learn to know and to flee from lies, and to abide by the Word and by the truth. God be praised that some in our day have learned this, and that the Papists only advanced the cause of the Gospel with their lying and clamoring and scribbling! Their lies are published in such clumsy shape that men are driven to the truth by them. The longer the enemies of the truth attack it, the more violent they become; but the suffering of our dear Lord Jesus has brought it about that they must thus, against their will, further the truth.

The Evangelists relate particularly that the sepulchre, into which the Lord Jesus was laid, was in a garden, that no one had ever been laid into it, and that Joseph had ordered it to be made for himself. This is related, not only to make the evidence of Christ's resurrection more reliable, but also because the body to be buried was not an ordinary one, but was different from all that had ever been on earth, and therefore deserved a special and new house, or tomb.

The flesh and blood of our dear Lord Jesus was like our own, with only this difference, that the flesh and blood in which the Son of the eternal Father appeared was holy flesh and blood. It was proper, therefore, that this flesh and blood should rest from its work in an entirely new tomb. The sepulchre was not His own, however, but that of Joseph. Christ did not become man and die for His own, but for our sake; and even so He lies in the tomb for our sake, and His tomb is our tomb. He had no tomb of His own, because He did not intend to remain in death and the grave; and so shall we through His resurrection be called from death and the grave on the judgment day and live with Him forever.

Another thing worthy of notice here is the conduct of Joseph, who had a tomb made for himself while he was yet living. This clearly shows that he did not leave the last hour out of mind, as the children of the world are wont to do, for they accommodate themselves to this life as if they were to remain here always. The pious look upon their whole earthly life as a pilgrimage, for they know

that they have no continuing city here, and therefore they desire a better country, that is, an everlasting and a heavenly.

A man on a journey may come to a pleasant inn, but he does not wish to abide there, for he knows that it is not his home. So Christians look upon this life as a lodging-place for a night. Kind treatment they accept with gratitude, but if the inn, as is generally the case, is cold and poor and uncomfortable, they find comfort in the thought that when this one cheerless night is over all will be well. Pious Joseph looked upon life in this way. He was a wealthy and honorable citizen of Jerusalem, still his constant thoughts were these: Thou canst not remain here always; thou too must take thy leave. Hence in the garden in which he delighted, he had a tomb prepared for himself, in which he expected to rest while waiting with all the saints for the glorious resurrection through Christ.

The rich should consider this and also erect such monuments on their pleasure-grounds, that they might be reminded of the life to come and be drawn away from the present life. But we find that every one seeks to avoid such thoughts, and aspires only after mirth and pleasure, although they are uncertain and transient and cannot be relied on even for one moment.

Thus, dear Christians, you have heard the whole history of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. We have now seen God's Son Himself toiling under the weight of sin and atoning for sin with His death. Hence this history would teach us, first of all, that the burden of sin is great and grievous, so that we

might be led to live in the fear of God and to beware of such a burden.

It also teaches us to find all comfort in Christ's sacrifice, so that should even sin and death attack us, we might still have the consolation sure that Christ has atoned for our sins, and that God, for Christ's sake, will be satisfied with us and not hold our sins in remembrance. These are the two chief doctrines which the history of the passion teaches us and in which we should constantly exercise ourselves.

This history, because it sets before us the example of Christ, is profitable besides for patience in suffering. It also urges us to love our neighbor, which the Lord Himself often urges us to do in words like these: "Love one another, as I have loved you." But who is able to relate all the benefits of our Lord Jesus' sufferings?

We should therefore heartily thank God for this doctrine, and pray that He through His Holy Spirit would make it burn brightly in our souls, and make us stronger day by day in faith and love and patience, until we shall have passed from this life of sorrow to the life eternal. May our merciful heavenly Father, through His Holy Spirit, grant us this for the sake of Jesus Christ, His dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

SUMMER-PORTION OF THE HOUSE-POSTIL.

FIRST EASTER-SERMON.

THE POWER AND THE BENEFIT OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

MATT. 28, 1-10. In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshiped Him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The present festival directs our attention to that consolatory and joyful article of our Creed, in which we confess that Christ on the third day arose again from the dead. This requires us, first of all, to know and consider the Easter narrative, then also to learn why this has happened and how to enjoy its benefits.

The Easter events were these. On the evening of Thursday before Easter, when Christ had arisen

from the Supper and had gone into the garden, He was betrayed by Judas and taken prisoner by the Jews. These dragged Him from one high priest to the other, until they finally concluded to give Him over into the hands of Pilate, who as governor had the power to pronounce judgment. About the third hour of the day sentence was passed upon Him, when He was led forth to execution and was crucified. At the sixth hour, about noon, or an hour later, an earthquake occurred and the sun was darkened. Towards the ninth hour, which would be nearly three hours before sunset, Christ died upon the cross. This is according to the statement of Mark; the other Evangelists do not state so definitely the hours in which these events took place.

In our Creed we confess that Christ arose again on the third day, which is far different from saying that He arose after three days. The Lord was not dead three entire nights and days. On Friday evening, about three hours before dark, He died. These three hours are called the first day. During the whole night and day of the Sabbath He remained in the grave, and also the following night until the next morning. This night counts also a day; for the Jews begin their day with the night, and count night and day as one whole day. We reverse this method of counting and call the day and the night one day. In the Church, however, the old Jewish method of reckoning the festivals was retained, so that these always begin with the evening of the previous day.

Very early on Sunday morning, which was the third day after the Friday on which Christ was

crucified, at the first dawn of day, when the soldiers were lying around the tomb, Christ, who had died, awoke to a new, eternal life, and arose from the dead in such a manner that the guards around the grave were unaware of His resurrection. From the account which Matthew gives of this event we must infer that Christ did not arise during the earthquake, which evidently began when the angel descended from heaven and rolled away the rock from the entrance of the tomb. Christ, however, passed out from the closed grave without disturbing the seals put upon it, just as on the evening of the same day He also came to His disciples through the doors which were shut.

When the earth began to quake and the angel appeared, the soldiers were so terrified that they lost all consciousness. As soon as they recovered they all ran from the grave, some in this, others in that direction; for the coming of the angel was to them no occasion of rejoicing, but one of terror and distress. There were others, however, who should be comforted by the cheerful tidings of the angel.

While the soldiers ran from the tomb, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, also Peter and John soon after, came to see the sepulchre. When the women arrive, the angel comforts them, telling them that Christ had arisen and that they should see Him in Galilee. He also orders them to depart in haste and to announce these things to the disciples. As the women return from the sepulchre the Lord meets Mary Magdalene in the guise of the gardener, and appears also to Peter, as John relates. In the evening of the same day He joins Himself to the two disciples who are

walking to Emmaus, and revealed Himself unto them when He brake the bread and gave it to them. After these two disciples had hastily returned to Jerusalem, to announce to the others what had happened unto them, how they had seen the Lord, and when the disciples were amazed at this, some however still doubting the truth of such reports, Jesus suddenly appears in their midst, the doors being closed. John 20.

These are the incidents of the holy Easter festival in reference to the revelation of our Lord and Saviour, as we learn from the Evangelists. It behooves us to be well acquainted with these facts; they refer to that article of our Creed which confesses that Christ arose again from the dead on the third day.

The mere knowledge of these events, however, is not enough; we must also realize their meaning and importance. Of these we will now speak a little; for the subject is so fertile and inexhaustible, that we could not fully present it though we preached about it every day of the year.

If we desire to comprehend the benefits of the resurrection of Christ, we must keep in view two distinct pictures. The one is sombre, full of distress, misery, and woes; it is the scene of blood presented to us on Good Friday—Christ crucified between murderers and dying with excruciating pain. This scene we must contemplate with much earnestness, as already said, to realize that it all happened on account of our sins, yea, that Christ as the true High Priest sacrificed Himself for us and paid with His death our debts. We ought all to know that our sins thus wounded and tormented

Christ, and that His sufferings were caused alone by our iniquities. Therefore, as often as we remember or view this doleful, bloody scene, we ought to bear in mind that we have before us our sins and the terrible wrath of God against them, a wrath so dire that no creature could endure it, that all atonement became impossible except the one made by the sacrifice and death of the Son of God. If this awful scene were the only one presented to our sight, and if it remained unchanged, it would be too terrible and painful.

But this picture of sorrow is changed, and in our Creed we join closely together these two articles: "Christ was crucified, died, was buried and descended into hell, and on the third day He rose again from the dead." Yea, ere three days had gone by, our Lord and Saviour presents to us another picture, beautiful, full of life, lovely and cheerful, in order that we might have the sure consolation that not only our sins were annihilated in the death of Christ, but that by His resurrection a new eternal righteousness and life was obtained, as St. Paul says, Rom. 4: "Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." And 1 Cor. 15: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." As in the former scene we saw the burden of our sin upon Him and bringing Him to the cross, so in this other scene of the resurrection we witness no longer sin, pain and sorrow, but only righteousness, joy and happiness. It is the victory of life over death—a life everlasting, with

which this temporal existence on earth cannot be compared. Of this we have reason to rejoice. Merely to view the former scene would be terrible, but when we view it in connection with the glad event of the resurrection, and when we bear in mind why our Lord suffered thus, we will derive from such a contemplation much benefit and consolation. It will become apparent to us how inexpressibly great the love of God toward us poor sinners was, as He had compassion on our misery, even to such an amazing extent that He did not spare His beloved and only Child, but gave Him up for us, to bear upon the cross and in death the burden of our transgressions, which were too heavy for us and would have crushed us to the earth. This load was taken from us and placed by God Himself upon His Son, who, as God from eternity, could alone bear the heavy weight of sin. Upon Him we now find our burden. Let us leave it there, for there is no one else to be found who could better relieve us of it.

The other scene presents to us Christ no longer in woe and misery, weighed down with the ponderous mass of our sins, which God has laid upon Him, but beautiful, glorious and rejoicing; for all the sins have disappeared from Him. From this we have a right to conclude: If our sins, on account of the sufferings of Christ, lie no longer upon us, but are taken from our shoulders by God Himself and placed upon His Son, and if on Easter, after the resurrection, they are no more to be seen, where then are they? Micah truly says: They are sunk into the depth of the sea, and no devil nor any body else shall find them again.

This article of our faith is glorious and blessed; whoever holds it not is no Christian; yet all the world reviles, slanders and abuses it. The Pope and his cardinals generally treat even this narrative as a fable to be laughed at; they are full-grown Epicureans, who smile with scorn when told of an eternal life to come. Our nobility, our burghers and our peasants also, believe in a future life, rather from custom than from true conviction, else they would act otherwise and not busy themselves solely with the cares, honors and employments of this temporal life, but would rather seek after that which is eternal. But we may preach and explain as we will, the world regards it all as foolishness. Thus we see that this article meets with opposition on every side; even they who possess and believe the Word of God do not take it to heart as earnestly as they should.

If we desire to be true Christians it is necessary for us firmly to establish in our hearts through faith this article, that Christ, who bore our sins upon the cross and died in payment for them, arose again from the dead for our justification. The more firmly we believe this, the more will our hearts rejoice and be comforted. For it is impossible not to be glad when we see Christ alive, a pure and beautiful being, who before, on account of our sins, was wretched and pitiable in death and in the grave. We are now convinced that our transgressions are removed and forever put away.

In the strength of this faith the early Christians composed and sang in Latin and German so charmingly and truly: „Christ ist erstanden, von der Marter alle, daß sollen wir alle froh sein, Christ will unser Trost sein;“

that is: Christ from all His sufferings has arisen, and will our solace be, hence we all should now rejoice. And again: *Agnus redemit oves, Christus innocens patri reconciliavit peccatores. Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando, dux vitæ mortuus regnat vivus;*” that is: Christ the innocent Lamb has by His sacrifice purchased and redeemed us poor, lost sheep, and has through His innocence reconciled us to the Father. There was an amazing conflict between life and death; the Lord of life dieth, but having arisen now liveth and ruleth.

Whoever composed these old hymns must certainly have had a proper and Christian conception of the great event, else he could not have depicted so skillfully the scene when death assaulted life, and when the devil madly rushed against it. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ permitted Himself to be slain; yet death was much mistaken in his aim; for the life in this Person whom he attacked was eternal. Death was not aware of this, that an eternal and divine power was enclosed in the mortal body, and was vanquished in the tilt; he attacked Him who cannot die, though He did die on the cross. For as surely as the human nature in Christ was dead, His divine nature was incapable of death, though it was so concealed in Him during His passion and death, as our old teachers represent it, that it manifested itself in no wise, and this for the very purpose that Christ might die. Death did all that he could do; but since the Lord, according to His divine nature, is life itself, He could not remain dead, but freed Himself from death and all his auxiliaries, vanquished sin and Satan, and now rules in a new life, exempt from all disturbance of

sin, the devil, and death. This is indeed a strange, perplexing declaration: Christ, though He died, still liveth, and by His dying despoiled death of all his power. Reason cannot comprehend this; it is a matter of faith. But to us it is a source of great comfort to know and to believe that death has lost his reign, and that we owe this, praise be to God, to that One whom death attacks and overcomes as he does all mortals, but whom he cannot hold; for, in the struggle ensuing, death himself perishes and is swallowed up, while Christ, who had died, lives and reigns forever.

St. Paul rejoices over this beautifully when he writes, Col. 2: "And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

Two facts are here presented. He says, in the first place, that "Christ has with His own life blotted out the handwriting" which was against us according to the law. By this the Apostle means that we learn from the law what God demands of us, what we should do and what we should avoid. If now we trespass against the law, either by omitting to do what we ought to do, or by doing what we ought not to do, our conscience will accuse us of the wrong done. Thus our conscience becomes, as it were, a handwriting against us, in which we

testify against ourselves as to our disobedience, and hence are subject to the wrath and punishment of God.

The law makes this "handwriting," as St. Paul says; for if there were no law there would be no transgression. Thus we have against us, at the same time our sins and the handwriting, which convicts us of them, so that we must plead guilty; even as a merchant would have to acknowledge his own signature and seal. Here, the Apostle would say, we receive the assistance of Christ our Lord. He blots out our handwriting, "nailing it to the cross," that is, He makes a hole through it and tears it to pieces, so that it can never again be used against us. To do this Christ was crucified; He bore our sins and paid our debts with His own life. This is what we have to notice first in the words of St. Paul above quoted.

In the second place he says: "Christ has spoiled principalities and powers," that is, He despoiled the devil of his power, so that he can no longer urge and force Christians to sin, as was his custom to do ere they were converted to Christ. Now they are enabled, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, to resist the wicked one, to defend themselves with the Gospel and faith, so as to repel him and thus have peace. Unto this end Christ sends us His Holy Spirit. In a similar manner are the "powers spoiled," that is, Christ has conquered death, whose power over us before was irresistible. Now the Christians have the weapons with which to conquer the devil and death; for these, though they rage and chafe, and bring all their might to bear against

the Christians, will not succeed, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

As Christ has conquered death, so has He also vanquished sin. In Himself He was just and free from sin, but inasmuch as He assumed the sins of others He became a sinner, as He laments, Psalm 49: "I said, Lord, be merciful, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against Thee." He prays thus because sin is upon Him. Nor does Christ seek to avoid this encounter with sin; He willingly goes into death upon the cross, as if He Himself had sinned and merited death, as Isaiah says: "He was numbered with the transgressors." And yet not He, but we, had sinned; He merely came to our rescue, and for our benefit took upon Himself our load of transgressions. But His holiness, though buried beneath the sins of others, is so great that sin cannot prevail against it. Thus sin and death are thwarted in their intentions; they encounter a too valiant adversary; death himself succumbs and is defeated in this struggle, as St. Paul declares.

The devil also made haste to assert his authority, and would fain bring Christ under his power; but he encounters a mightier One, whom he cannot conquer. For Christ, though much distressed by His sufferings and apparently overcome by the devil, is nevertheless strong and invincible. The devil was ignorant of this and loses all his power, so that Christ can be said to have conquered at the time when Satan was sure of victory. Hence these three terrible foes, the devil, sin, and death, are now defeated and under the feet of Christ.

This glorious victory we celebrate to-day. Above all we must firmly believe that in Christ there was a contest between God and the devil, between righteousness and sin, between life and death, between that which is good and that which is evil, between purity and all manner of corruption, and that the triumph was on the side of God. This scene we ought to cherish fondly and earnestly, and often to contemplate.

In the former scene of suffering and death we witnessed our sin, our sentence of condemnation and death resting heavily upon Christ, making Him a distressed, pitiable Man; now, on Easter, we have the other scene, unalloyed with sin; no curse, no frown, no death is visible; it is all life, mercy, happiness and righteousness in Christ. This picture can and should cheer our hearts. We should regard it with no other feeling but that to-day God brings us also to life with Christ. We should firmly believe that as we see no sin nor death nor condemnation in Christ, so God will also, for Christ's sake, consider us free from these if we faithfully rely upon His Son and depend upon His resurrection. Such a blessing we derive from faith. The day will come, however, when faith shall be lost in sight and full fruition.

Nevertheless, while we are here on earth sin, death, disgrace and reproach, and all kinds of wants and infirmities remain with us, and we must patiently bear them. These all relate, however, only to the flesh; for in our faith we are already happy. As Christ arose from the dead, and has a life eternal, free from sin and death, so have we these treasures in faith. And as surely as the devil

could not prevail against Christ, but had to flee, so surely will he also flee from the Christian who believes. In the end our body will also be perfected, so that neither sin nor death can have power over it. For the present we are as weak and sinful as other people, only that we strive to shun open and gross sins. It is true, Christians may also, now and then, be guilty of these, but they remain not in them; they flee them again through earnest repentance, and obtain through faith forgiveness of all their sins.

Hence it is impossible to judge a Christian aright by his external life and conduct. He may not be guilty of open, gross sins against conscience, yet he is not free from sins and infirmities. Therefore we must daily pray: "Forgive us our trespasses." On the other hand, it may be that heathens and unbelievers, in their outward walk and life, appear before the world just as good, yea, even better than the true children of God. To know and judge a Christian correctly, it is necessary to make his faith the criterion. As to our flesh and blood we are sinners, must die and suffer many evils upon earth, perhaps even more than others who have no faith, since Christians feel the burden of their sins and are troubled by them, while the others live in full security, undisturbed by their guilt.

How then can Christians claim to be holy and free from sin? By believing that in Christ, who died for their sins and arose again from the dead, they have forgiveness, upon which they rely and which they earnestly seek in faith. Christians only can do this; for to believe the forgiveness of sins, and to seek it, is the work of the Holy Ghost.

Where the Holy Ghost is wanting, this faith is also absent. The enemies of the Gospel, the Pope and his crowd, are living examples; they are great and abominable sinners, but they know it not, nor do they ask forgiveness in faith. If, now and then, a conviction of their sins breaks in upon them, they know not what to do, they despair. That Christ arose from the dead, without sin, is an unknown story to them. A Christian, however, has comfort and happiness in Christ in proportion to the faith wherewith he contemplates this scene of the resurrection; he views Christ no longer bloody and wounded, but in all His beauty and loveliness. For as He formerly, on account of our sins, was bleeding and crucified, so He now has, for our consolation, an eternal life, full of happiness and joy. Let us therefore be glad and sing; all this has happened in our behalf.

These two facts then belong together: through faith in Christ we are pure and holy; on account of the old Adam within us we are impure and sinners. This impurity we remember when we pray: "Our Father . . . forgive us our trespasses," and are comforted in the faith that God, for Christ's sake and in the power of His resurrection, hears us and pardons us, and gives us eternal life. Thus we are holy in Christ through faith, even if we are sinners; for it matters not how much is yet lacking in us: Christ our Lord and Head arose from the dead; He has conquered sin and death, and we, through faith in Him, are also freed from their power. Whoever does not believe in this and has not Christ, will lie and remain under the dominion of sin, in spite of all his good works and religious observances.

Let us therefore earnestly view and study this joyful, lovely, and blessed Easter scene. It is a picture without sin and death. If sin troubles us, if our conscience accuses us of evil deeds and faithlessness, let us remember and exclaim: It is true, we are sinners, nor can we deny the weakness of our faith; but we console ourselves with the knowledge that Jesus Christ has taken upon Himself and borne our iniquities; and by His resurrection on this glorious Easter festival, sin and punishment threaten us no more. Say, devil, sin and death, why did you accuse this Man before Pilate and nail Him to the cross? Did you do right in this? And sin, and death, and the devil will then confess that a mistake was made—that they wrongfully abused Him. Then we can say to sin, death and the devil: Get you gone, molest us not!

But perhaps our timid hearts will object and ask: How dare we rely on this,—are we not sinners? Be sure then to reply: Yes, it is so; we are sinners; but that shall not cause us to doubt, since Christ is no sinner. He died and arose again from the dead for us, and the benefits of this are ours. If this does not satisfy you, settle it with Him; ask Him what He did with your sins; whether they were too heavy for Him, so that He could not bear them and had to lay them upon you again. He will surely be at ease who thus can turn the devil with his accusations to Christ, who silenced him before so completely.

This is the true doctrine concerning faith, which every one supposes himself to possess and to understand. There are, however, but few who know it aright; for it cannot be taught merely with words;

the Holy Ghost must do it. If you have mastered this art, you are a Christian ; but if you are imperfect in it, thank God that you belong to the number of those who love to hear of it, and do not revile it, as the Turks, Jews and Papists do, who imagine themselves so upright that they are perfectly justified in the sight of God, and need not this Easter narrative in their struggle with sin, death and the devil. Among them faith perishes entirely. May we learn utterly to disregard our own holiness, and to keep before our eyes only this Easter scene, Christ arisen from the dead, the Conqueror over death, sin and hell. If we thus look to Christ alone, and not to ourselves, just as our eyes do not look upon themselves while we are going forward, it will be well for us. May our Lord Jesus Christ grant us this in mercy. Amen.

SECOND EASTER-SERMON.

ON THE 28. CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

We have already learned, my beloved, how and why the resurrection of Christ occurred, and what benefits we derive from it. Our Gospel exhibits to us this still further.

Above all we notice the important fact that the holy angels are the first messengers who bring the happy tidings that Christ has arisen and that the sepulchre is empty, reminding the women that Christ had foretold all this unto them, though they could then neither believe it nor understand it. Such a message is to us a plain assurance that the angels, who are pure and holy spirits, do neither despise nor shun us poor sinners, but rather desire to be our friends, since Christ died and arose again in our behalf.

If God had desired that we should neither hear of this resurrection nor enjoy it, He would not have sent from heaven the blessed angels, His messengers, to announce to us this great event. But now He sets apart and sends His angels to be unto us the first heralds of the resurrection of His Son; and in this we find an assurance that Christ, as we have seen, arose for us, and also that it is the pleasure of God that we should have full faith in this angelic message and be comforted thereby. This fact, the sending of the angels, is thus of great importance; from it we must conclude: The resurrection of

Christ, as well as His passion, took place in our behalf, for our especial benefit.

Besides, we learn the full meaning of the resurrection of Christ from the language of the angels. They come with a twofold message, directed, first, to the women, that they should not fear, but rejoice that Christ had arisen, and then also containing the command not to conceal this, but to go in haste to the disciples with the announcement of the great event. In either import this message is full of cheer. The first words of the angel were: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen as He said." Or, in other words: What strange and foolish people ye are to be astonished and afraid. Christ lives and is arisen from the dead, therefore ye ought to rejoice and not be troubled. We can interpret the language of the message in no other way; when one is told not to fear, he is encouraged and exhorted to be glad, hoping for the best, while he who fears can only anticipate some evil which he seeks to avoid. He who stands in dread of the hangman, of death, of sin, and of the wrath of God, can have no joy, no hope, but only lamentation and sorrow, care and sore distress. This shall no longer be your condition, the angel says, since Christ is risen: be ye comforted with this resurrection and strengthened against the devil, sin, death, and hell. If these enemies could still injure us, we of course would have to fear them. Therefore, the importance of this first command: be ye not afraid, which comes not only to those women, but to all baptized and believing Christians, who know and believe that Christ is risen indeed.

The other portion of this message is seemingly of less import, while really it has the same meaning as the former. When the angel urges the women to go quickly to announce the resurrection of Christ to His disciples, we have in this but another exhortation that they should rejoice and receive blessings from this event. Who, indeed, are these disciples? Poor sinners, who deserted their Lord in the time of His greatest misery, especially Peter, who even denied Him. Just then they were congregated together in secret, for fear of the Jews; they had not the least expectation of Christ's resurrection, or that He would shortly establish His kingdom; and even now, when the women come and tell that they had seen the Lord, when Simon Peter and those who had gone to Emmaus come and tell their story, none of the disciples would credit their report, regarding it as a fable. Yes, they are even weak and slow to believe when the Lord Himself appears in their midst, showing them His hands and feet, which He suffers them to feel and to touch.

The great anxiety of the angel to announce the resurrection of Christ to the disciples, who were nearly drowned in unbelief and tormented with an accusing conscience, is a certain indication that the Lord is arisen for the consolation of those who are weak in faith, or perhaps unbelieving, that they, in the end, might seek and find Him their help and defence.

If we, therefore, discover that we are afflicted with similar weaknesses, with sin and unbelief, we should not despair, nor suppose that Christ will not

accept us, but should remember how, in behalf of such poor, weak and miserable sinners, the angels came from heaven and quickly dispatched the women to tell them that Christ was arisen, that thereby they might be comforted and rejoice. For, as we have already heard, the resurrection of Christ brings consolation, joy and a good conscience, since it banishes sin, death and the wrath of God from our sight.

Thus do the angels of heaven preach concerning the resurrection, that they might console, with this message, the poor, frightened consciences. Surely, we ought to be fully satisfied with such tidings. But in addition to this Christ Himself appears to the women and speaks to them as the angels did, greets them in the most friendly manner, and tells them not to fear. He thus instructs us all to improve aright the occasion of His resurrection, to expel all fear, and to rejoice with our whole heart, knowing that we have now no dead and buried Christ, who is to be honored at His tomb, as the women here proposed to do when they came to anoint His lifeless body, which would have been of no avail to Him nor of any consolation or benefit to themselves, but that we have a living Christ in whom we rejoice, and whose victory becomes our own through faith.

What now is there in all the world that could frighten a Christian who has Jesus for his Lord? Sin cannot do it, for we know that Christ has paid its debt; nor can it be death, since Christ has conquered him. Hell is rent asunder, and the devil is a prisoner and in chains. It matters not if the world, as she is wont to do, persecutes the Chris-

tians and torments them in every way; this is but a temporal suffering and can readily be endured if we know and believe that Christ arose for us and that now we have a life eternal. Let us, therefore, well learn and retain in memory the precious tidings of the angel: "Fear ye not, but be glad; praise God and give thanks unto Him; Christ is arisen and is no longer in the grave."

But this is not the only consoling assurance which we receive; Christ Himself makes it still greater and more glorious. He says: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." Or, as St. John relates the occurrence in the 20. chapter, Christ told Mary: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and unto your Father, and to my God, and to your God."

How consoling is this term brethren, which Christ here applies to His disciples. Among men this appellation is common, and means that one whom we call brother is a sharer with us of our heritage or of friendship. But when Christ, the Son of God, calls us brethren, the name becomes most excellent, most glorious, and of inexpressible value. If He calls us brethren, we thereby become also partakers of His heritage; for Christ surely does not make use of this name merely for appearance' sake, as men often do who address each other as "dear brother," while at the same time they are enemies at heart, and wish each other ill. When Christ calls us brethren He really means what the word implies, and declares that He will be our brother, and will regard us and deal with us in every respect as with brethren.

How did the Apostles merit such an honor? Did they perhaps earn this distinction when they shamefully deserted Him, when they denied Him and lost all confidence in His promise that He would live again and establish His kingdom? Such conduct would indeed have been a sufficient reason for the Lord to regard them as His enemies, and not as brethren. But, as already shown, Christ knows them to be sinners, and desires poor sinners to enjoy the benefits of His resurrection; else He would surely not have called His disciples brethren, who had by their timid and faithless conduct shown themselves so unworthy of this name. We also are indeed not worthy of this name, being such poor sinners, yet we are permitted to make use of it; yea, Christ teaches all Christians, when they pray, to say: "Our Father who art in heaven." If we call God in heaven our Father, then it follows that we are Christ's brethren, as He says in this connection: "I ascend unto my Father, and unto your Father, and to my God and to your God." There is this distinction however: Christ is in Himself the real and eternal Son of God, we on the other hand obtain this name through Christ, who died for us and arose from the dead that we, through faith in Him, might become children of God, *Filii adoptati, non nati*; (children by adoption, not by birth,) as St. Paul describes the relation.

With the name brethren, which the Lord applies to His disciples, He really pronounces to them the absolution from all their sins, that they might forget them and be no longer troubled on their account. Christ has no sin; if then the disciples are His brethren, they must likewise be free from

sin, else Christ would have an advantage over them in the heritage and would not really be our brother; but now He says that we are His brethren, from which it follows that we are equal heirs with Him.

What is the inheritance of Christ? Neither money, nor goods, nor great power and temporal glory. Experience teaches that many, who are not children of God and not the brethren of Christ, have such earthly possessions; hence these cannot be the heritage of Christ, which He and His brethren alone possess. With these temporal gifts it is as with sunshine and rain and other earthly blessings; God bestows them equally upon the wicked and the just. The true heritage of Christ is that of which Paul speaks, 1 Cor. 1: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

We poor mortals are so blinded by sin that of ourselves we know nothing of God, of His being and will, nor of sin and righteousness. And even though there is yet a small glimmer of the knowledge of God within us, as St. Paul writes Rom. 1, yet it is evident that this is easily quenched and that we readily fall into error and idolatry. The very first advantage of being an heir with Christ is a correct knowledge of God, as He says Matt. 11: "Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." This then is the greatest and highest wisdom, compared with which all worldly wisdom is utter foolishness. All human wisdom, though

much honored among men, is only of short duration, but this knowledge of God in Christ, and of His grace and mercy toward us, is the true, eternal wisdom, yea, the life everlasting, as Christ says, and enables us not only to defend ourselves against men, but also to contend with the devil, and to know and to judge him aright.

The other portion of our heritage is that "Christ is made unto us righteousness." We not only live in sin, but are conceived and born therein; through Christ, however, this sin is not accounted unto us; God forgives us and pardons us for the sake of His Son. This is justification; God considers us righteous, though we, in ourselves, are poor, miserable sinners.

The third portion of our heritage is that "Christ is made unto us sanctification." This He is unto us not only by consecrating Himself as a sacrifice for us, as John 17. declares, but also by sending us His Holy Spirit, who assures our hearts of the mercy of God, and comforts and directs and supports us in all times of sorrow and tribulation, also working in us a new life, resisting sin, and prompting to true obedience towards God.

The fourth portion of our heritage is that "Christ is made unto us redemption." Let tribulations, sorrows, want, and persecutions come as they will, if Christ is only with us and defends us, they are harmless; we shall conquer in the end and have redemption from them all, not alone in this world, but also in eternity.

We should indeed earnestly long for such a precious, blessed and eternal heritage, and rejoice

over it with our whole heart. This hope and privilege we have in Christ, since He calls us brethren. Alas, that we fritter away this joy; we are merrier if some one gives us a hundred dollars than when the Son of God makes us heirs of His kingdom and everlasting heritage. We would indeed have great reason to be satisfied if Christ but permitted us to be His disciples, His servants, His pupils, or if He called us His friends; for who could wish for a nobler Lord or a better Master. But He does much more than this, and elevates us to the loftiest position; He calls us "His brethren." Let us, therefore, never forget the great consolation contained in this everlasting brotherhood; and may we in all distress, and in the bitter hour of death, derive all comfort from it.

To this the devil objects. He brings it about that the Pope and the false, delusive teachers say naught of this brotherhood, and make for themselves, in the devil's name, other associations, where the good works, so called, of saints, of monks, and of priests are distributed as a heritage. But men deserve such delusion. If they will not rejoice and be comforted in the brotherhood of Christ, they fully deserve to go astray into other impious, idolatrous, false and worthless brotherhoods, in which they place their confidence and trust.

Let us, therefore, be grateful for the true doctrine and cordially receive it; let us make good use of the resurrection of Christ, coming unto Him as to our brother, in whom we have all confidence, fully believing that His life is the guarantee of our salvation and our defence from all wrath to come. If

we were firm in this belief no misfortune could disturb us; for amid all suffering which may fall to our lot, we know that Christ liveth and that we shall live with Him. Why should the fact of our earthly sufferings distress us, when we are sure of eternal happiness in Christ; or why should we entertain enmity toward those who abuse us? We ought rather to pity them, since by their hatred and envy toward us they clearly show that they are not of this brotherhood and can have no part in the eternal inheritance. What good will their earthly possessions do them, their influence, their money, their goods and renown, which they only misuse unto sin and everlasting condemnation?

If, therefore, we dearly loved this brotherhood in Christ, we would not be so eager after temporal things, but would care more for the eternal heritage which is secured to us in this brotherhood. St. Paul speaks very pertinently of this when, dwelling upon the resurrection of Christ, he says, Colossians 3. chapter: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." If we wish in truth to lay claim to this brotherhood and to boast that we are children of God, we must also strive to do our Father's will and to be obedient children. We must, as St. Paul says, "mortify our members which are upon earth," that is, we must restrain our evil desires and avoid evil deeds, and "put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one

another, and forgiving one another," &c. We see, then, why sanctification was mentioned as a part of the heritage in Christ; it must surely follow, in faith and in life, as St. Paul also explains 1 Cor. 5: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." And again: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened." These words may seem strange, but they entirely correspond with the words of St. Paul which we have considered, that "Christ was made unto us righteousness and sanctification." If we believe that Christ paid for our sins, we have through such faith forgiveness of our sins and are justified, or as St. Paul calls it, "freed from the old leaven." Nevertheless, our flesh and blood is not totally mortified, but full of the old leaven and evil lusts; these we ought to purge out and mortify, cherishing them no more, but strive after sanctification. To this end Christ gives us His Holy Spirit, that we may resist sin and do the will of God.

From this you observe, my beloved, what effects the resurrection of Christ should have in us, namely, the banishing of our fear, the recognition of Christ as our Brother, and the joyful acceptance of the heritage which He has prepared for us. We ought also so to conduct ourselves that we may not, as undutiful children, lose this inheritance through our disobedience. In this manner will we rightly enjoy the glorious results of the resurrection and properly celebrate Easter.

Where this is not done, where people remain in sin and disobedience, or are too timid to lay hold upon this consolation in their woes and tribulations, there surely this resurrection and glorious heritage will be of no avail. *

May God grant us His Holy Spirit, through Christ Jesus, that our hearts may be cheered by this resurrection, that our faith and confidence and hope therein may increase from day to day, and that through it we may finally be saved. Amen.

THIRD EASTER-SERMON.

LUKE 24, 36-47. And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And He saith unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and saith unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

The incidents of our text also occurred on Easter, when the two disciples had returned from Emmaus to Jerusalem, and had narrated to the others what had happened to them and told them that they had seen the Lord. They are in fact the same which John relates, and which form the text for next Sunday, making no mention, however, of Thomas and his experience, which occurred eight days later and is presented to our consideration by the lesson of the following Sunday. Our text, which contains much important matter, might be considered under various heads, but inasmuch as we have already dwelt upon the resurrection itself, we will now confine our discourse to two main

points presented by our lesson. First we notice the fact that the disciples, when Christ, the doors being locked, unexpectedly appeared before them, were terrified and supposed they saw a spirit.

From this we learn that the appearance of spirits is nothing new. The Lord Himself does not deny the possibility of such manifestations, but rather confirms the belief in them when He points out the difference between Himself and spirits. He says: "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones."

From this we learn the important and salutary lesson that we are very much mistaken, when we think ourselves alone and the devil hundreds of miles removed from us. He is constantly about us, and sometimes assumes strange masks. I myself have seen him in the form of a pig, of a bundle of burning straw, and in similar disguises. One must know this, lest we become superstitious and think that the spirits which appear are the souls of dead men, as it has been formerly customary to believe. This superstitious belief has been of great advantage to the popish mass and has given it greater importance. Whenever the devil appeared, or made himself heard, people thought that the spirits of the dead were manifesting themselves, as is clearly seen from the writings of popish authors, and even from those of Gregory and other ancient teachers, who regarded such appearances not as spooks of the devil, but as manifestations of the spirits of the dead, even of those who died in faith. We all know, alas, but too well what deplorable, horrible errors and superstitions resulted from this fancy.

Purgatory was supported by this belief, and out of the dream of purgatory grew the doctrine concerning works of supererogation and their benefits to the dead. It is self-evident that the death and resurrection of Christ was lost out of sight by such false doctrines, and that the works of men were glorified instead. Another result was the abomination of the mass, whereby the sacrifice of Christ was set aside and the Lord's Supper shockingly abused; for it was regarded as instituted for the dead and not for the living. Such misery resulted from the superstitious belief that the souls of the departed had re-appeared; when it really was the devil who exhibited himself under various disguises in various places. The people were duped by this deviltry, else they would have had no confidence in the manifestations of spirits; for the devil is known to be a murderer and a liar, so that Christ would not accept his testimony even when he spoke the truth, as we see from the first chapter of St. Mark and from other similar passages.

We assert, therefore, the great importance of knowing and believing that the devil really does appear among us in various shapes and forms. Likewise do the holy angels, so that we are constantly surrounded by them and by devils. The latter are ever on the alert to injure, to seduce and to destroy us, while the good angels hover around us, if we are pious and walk in the fear of God, to protect us from evil and from harm. This we should know, that we may learn to fear God, to pray more fervently day by day, and to trust in Him alone, and implore His protection against the evil spirits, so that they may not harm us with

pestilence, nor endanger us with poisons, nor overwhelm us with other afflictions.

The surest and best method of escaping these attacks is to live in the fear of God, to be earnest in prayer, and to love His holy Word. This is the true charm with which we can make ourselves secure from the attacks of the enemy. In that heart, in which the Word of God has its home, the devil cannot abide; he will trot off speedily. Thus the devil cannot make his home in the Church if Christ is there, and Christ has said: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I be in the midst of them;" hence we say that the devil must vanish when Christ comes. It behooves us, therefore, to hear God's Word willingly, to meditate upon it and to converse about it often and gladly. But where falsehoods, slanders and other sins prevail and the conscience is violated, there Christ and His angels depart. Let no one then gainsay the fact that the devil appears, that he terrifies and seduces men, and that he injures them secretly wherever he can. Let us rather learn to resist this demon with the holy cross, not with that alone which we make with the motions of the hand, but with that which we have in our heart by faith, which finds all consolation in the Word of God, and let earnest prayer not be forgotten. Then it matters not how much the devil clatters and spooks around; we are safe from him. Tell him boldly to his face: Thou art a devil and wilt remain such, but I am a Christian and have a Protector mightier than thou; therefore avaunt and disturb me not.

The devil has more than once attempted to frighten me in my own house by making a clatter, but he scared me not in the least; for I stood upon my authority and told him: See here, I know that God placed me in this house and made me master over it; now if thou hast a better claim to the mastery here than I, then stay; but thou hast no business here; I tell thee thou belongest somewhere else, even to the infernal abyss of hell. Then I went to sleep again, and left him to his rage; for I was assured he could do me no harm. This is the first consideration presented to us by our text, which we could not pass by in silence; for the disciples and the Lord Himself speak of spirits that are evil, and which appear for no other purpose than to frighten people and to make them timid.

We come now to the other part of our meditation, in which we shall consider the words of Christ: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

He says: This preaching, that Christ must die and rise again from the dead, shall begin at Jerusalem, and thence shall spread throughout the whole world, so that in His name, and in that alone, repentance and remission of sins shall be proclaimed. No repentance nor any remission of sins, if dependent upon any other name, even if it be that of St. Peter or of St. Paul, and least of all if it be my own name, is of any account. Why then should I become a monk, with the intention of doing good works whereby I might merit forgiveness of sins?

Our text tells us that Christ, by His death and resurrection, obtained for us forgiveness of sins, which "is preached in His name," and that he who desires to be benefited thereby must believe that Christ died for him and arose again from the dead. This is the preaching to which the text exhorts.

To prevent the impression as if this preaching could be fully understood and comprehended at once in all its bearings, the Evangelist purposely adds these words: "Then opened He," namely the Lord Himself, "their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." This is necessary, or people will go to Church and return with as little knowledge of what they heard as cows would have if they had been there. If Christ does not first open the understanding all is dark; it cannot be otherwise.

But what does the Lord mean when He speaks at the same time of "repentance and remission of sins" as intimately connected, and when He states that "this preaching shall begin at Jerusalem?" Is this not a perverse order, to begin the preaching of repentance and remission of sins at Jerusalem, where the greatest saints are dwelling, the Levites, the high priests and the people of God? Everybody is under the impression that this city has no need whatever of the preaching of repentance and of the remission of sins.

These words of the Lord, however, have this meaning: Ye Levites and Jews shall be the first to whom repentance and remission of sins shall be preached, that you may amend your evil ways; if you heed not this preaching, you will nevermore obtain remission of your sins. To preach repent-

ance is nothing else than to announce to the people that they are miserable sinners and liable to damnation, and that it is impossible for them to be saved without conversion and complete change.

It is the Lord's will that such preaching shall be heard throughout the whole world, so that no one might plead ignorance in this, but that all should know and confess that they are sinners. What other advantage could accrue from the preaching of repentance? Yea, thus it must be, in accordance with the Lord's will, that this preaching must begin at Jerusalem, among the chosen people of God, at the holiest place. The Pharisees shall hear the summons to repentance, for they are worse in the sight of God than harlots and reprobates, since they regard themselves good and holy, and not in need of the preaching which calls to repentance.

In short, Christ, with the words under consideration, condemns the entire world and calls all men sinners, and desires of us, if we wish to be saved at all, to fall upon our knees and to exclaim with uplifted hands: Lord, I am a sinner; I need conversion, that I may become better; but inasmuch as I cannot bring this about by myself, be Thou my help, O Lord, and let Thy mercy be upon me.

If we are thus minded, and have no confidence at all in our own exertions and life, then we will realize what is meant by that other expression: remission of sins. The Lord commands that this also shall be preached. First, and chiefly, we must know that we are sinners, and then cry for mercy. If one wishes to become a Christian, he must first of all take this step and confess himself a sinner, having learned to know what sin is; then the par-

don of sin, with all its cheer and consolation, can be appropriated. These words of Christ convey, therefore, these two facts to us: that the whole world is steeped in sin, and that it can only be made just and holy through Himself, the Saviour of all.

Man's thoughts are different. One supposes himself pleasing unto God because he chastens his body much and prays often; another, because he has bestowed many alms, and so on. But the Gospel calls all men sinners and tells them: Repent. This causes contradiction; the Pope refuses to acknowledge himself a sinner, as also does the monk in his cloister. In fact, we all are averse to this confession and strive to palm ourselves off as unblamable; but in this endeavor we can never succeed.

What then shall we do? Shall we despair because we are sinners and because God is an enemy to sin? No, for Christ gave the command to preach not only repentance, but also the remission of sins, which should be unto all those who believe in His name. We remember this and are comforted. We say: O Lord, we are great offenders; but spare us for Thy mercy's sake, for we have no merits of our own. If we do this, relief is at hand; for we have the promise of God that the sins of all who accept the Gospel shall be forgiven. This is surely the meaning of Christ's command to preach remission of sins in His name. Without Christ there is no remission.

Thus it is evident that the sale of indulgences by the Pope is a lie and a cheat. He sells them in the name and in behalf of the merits of departed

saints, while Christ positively declares: "In my name shall remission be preached;" no one else but I died for you, or rose again from the dead that you might live.

This preaching is called heresy by our enemies, as you are aware, and we are basely charged with forbidding good works. Well, let them slander. We did not first use this language, nor did we invent the doctrine that in the name of Jesus repentance shall be preached unto all nations. But, I ask, if our own good works could suffice, why yet preach repentance? The righteous need no such preaching, but the sinners do. The command of Christ, however, is a general one; He says: Preach repentance to the whole world; from which it follows that all are sinners, and that sin alone, and no good works, are to be found throughout the earth. Hence we see the necessity of preaching repentance and remission of sins.

But the perverse adversaries will not heed this, and continue their slander that we forbid good works. May God therefore enlighten our understanding and enable us earnestly to say: O Lord, have mercy upon us poor wretched sinners; grant that we may comfort ourselves with Thy promise of remission of sins, which Thou hast ordered to be preached in Thy name. Whoever makes such a confession gives God the praise by recognizing His Word as truth, which accuses us all of sin and demands repentance. But he also gives God the praise by believing the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus. The impenitent and unbelieving, on the contrary, blaspheme God, and in the end receive their punishment.

Thus we can become just before God. Then we should proclaim the Gospel also unto others, do good to them and help them, be obedient, and attend to the duties of our calling. In this wise we can become true saints, holy before God through faith, and then also unblamable before men in our life. The person must first be made pure and acceptable through faith, else what would all good works avail? Surely it would be absurd to call any deed good when the source from which it comes is bad and impure. The heart discredits the truthfulness of God, who orders the preaching of repentance throughout the whole world, and since it refuses to acknowledge itself corrupted by sin, it cannot accept the forgiveness which is preached, and is not benefited thereby.

They who confess themselves sinners, and believe that God for Christ's sake pardons them, are true Christians, in whom there is repentance and remission of sins. Because we teach thus, we are termed heretics and called accursed. But that matters naught. We rejoice that by the mercy of God we have the true doctrine, that we know ourselves to be sinners and can appropriate the consolation of God's Word. In this faith we are enabled to do truly good works, which are performed in repentance and faith. Where this doctrine and preaching has a home, there Christ is; no devil can rule there, nor need his manifestations be feared. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is a happy peaceful heart, prepared to do the Lord's will.

The others who are void of faith can do no good work; and whatever they do, though it be in itself not bad, they do reluctantly and without pleasure.

Such works are cheerless and disagreeable, and God cannot be pleased with them. The heart becomes cheerful only through faith in Christ, which accepts the truth that we are sinners, but also embraces the promise of the gracious remission of sins.

A Christian is therefore both a sinner and a saint; he is evil and is good. In ourselves we are sinners, but Christ gives us another name when He mercifully forgives our sins for His sake. Hence both appellations are true. Sins are yet in us, for the old Adam still lives within; and again they are not present, because God blots them out for Christ's sake. They are present before my eyes; I see them and I feel them; but there stands Christ and tells me to repent, to confess myself just what I am, a sinner, and declares unto me forgiveness of my sins through faith in His name.

Repentance alone, though necessary, is not sufficient; faith in the remission of sins through Christ must also be added. Where there is such faith, God no longer sees sin; for then we appear before Him not in our own righteousness, but in that of Christ. He adorns us with grace and righteousness even if, in our own eyes, we are miserable sinners, full of weakness and unbelief. But this conviction of our own wickedness shall not drive us to despair, else we could not heed the preaching of repentance. No, we come and say: O Lord, we are damnable sinners, but Thou declarest that we shall not remain such, and hast commanded remission of sins to be preached at all times in Thy name.

This is the faith that makes Christians. If you kill yourself by fasting, if you beggar yourself by

giving alms, you will gain nothing by it; such conduct will make no Christian of you, nor can you thus earn heaven or appease God. Here we read: "In my name should repentance and remission of sins be preached." Christ says: Tell the people of their sins, and of God's wrath on that account; but tell them also of this remission for their consolation. Christ Jesus alone is our robe of righteousness and our salvation; if we are clothed therein, God is our Father, a merciful God, who condemns us not as sinners, but adjudges us righteous, holy and acceptable, and gives us eternal life.

You well know that this glorious doctrine was not taught before the Gospel of salvation was again preached. The words of the text, that forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ should be preached, indeed remained, but they were not impressed upon the people's minds; doctrine and practice were totally opposed to them, so that he who desired to be saved was taught to do good works, so called, and to pay his debt of sins by his own endeavors. What else was this but to remove sin in man's own name? But such procedure is wrong and useless. The name of Christ, and that alone, brings remission, and therefore this name must be preached. Not fasting nor giving of alms, not becoming monks or nuns, neither the Pope, not even Peter and Paul, nor the Virgin Mary, can aid us at all in this. Only in the name of Christ remission of sin is to be preached.

From this we learn how pitiable the Papists are, and how miserably they are swindled. When they confess their sins and fain would be very pious,

believing themselves absolved from all their sins, they have no remission nor absolution in the name of Jesus, as it should be, but only in the name of the holy Virgin, of the Apostles, or in the merits of the other saints. This is a sham absolution, an abomination to be shunned as the very devil himself. And yet, to increase this horror, people are forced to this practice, as if it were the most glorious service of God. The command of Christ is not thus; He says in our text, remission of sins shall be preached in the name of Jesus, and in none other. Not one of the saints died for our sins; what need then have we of their name to obtain remission of sins?

This doctrine we learn from the Gospel before us, that they who confess their sins and know that they are sinners shall obtain forgiveness in the name of Christ. This method of getting rid of our guilt seems very easy. To accomplish this it is not necessary to carry stones, to build churches, to read mass, but only to hear God's Word, and to praise Him when He has repentance preached unto us, confessing ourselves the guilty ones and then trusting implicitly in His mercy, relying fully upon the name of Jesus, in whom remission is preached. Where such faith exists, sin can do no harm; Jesus is there with the power of His name, and that makes just. We are therefore secure, not because we have done no wrong, but because for Christ's sake we are accounted of God holy and justified. This we also confess in our Creed: I believe the forgiveness of sins. For such mercy we should be thankful to God, who has given us the Gospel and brought us into the kingdom of Christ; for this is

a kingdom of grace, in which all sins are remitted in the name of Jesus.

This doctrine of the remission of sins must be clearly understood and kept apart from that which concerns good works. We do not say that they who desire salvation shall not do good works; for this obligation has been imposed long ago in the law; but we do urge that such good works have nothing at all to do with the forgiveness of sins. Peter and Paul, and all the saints, may have been ever so upright in their daily walk, but this availed them nothing before God; they would not thereby have been justified; only their faith in Christ, that through His death they had forgiveness of sins and eternal life, availed them. We must do good works; but notwithstanding this we must believe the forgiveness of sins only in the name of Christ. Grant us this consummation, Jesus, our Lord and our Saviour. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(QUASIMODOGENITI.)

JOHN 20, 19-31. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto Him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.

Our text recounts the same incident of which mention is made in the previous sermon for Easter. It occurred after the return of the two disciples from Emmaus to Jerusalem, where they told their brethren that they had seen the Lord. In our text, however, we have a fuller account of this occurrence; for St. John differs in his descriptions from the other Evangelists in this, that he

not only narrates the incidents, but also adds the sayings, the words of Christ, which are indeed of chief importance. According to this his custom, he recounts in our text the words not found in the other Evangelists, which were spoken by the Lord after He had greeted His disciples and had shown them His hands and feet: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

These are most precious words, by which Christ invests the disciples with the office of preaching, making arrangements for the application of the glorious results of His sufferings and resurrection. For if this great occurrence had not been preached in its various bearings, if it had remained a mere historical event, it would have been of no avail for us. This we learn from the condition of the Papists. They are acquainted with the event and its record as well as we, but they do not preach it as Christ directs; hence their mere historical knowledge of it benefits them no more than if it were the story of Dietrich of Bern, which one hears and learns; they have simply the recollection of the occurrence. It is therefore absolutely necessary to make a proper use of the narrative of Christ's sufferings and resurrection.

How to do this we learn from the words of the Lord Himself when He says: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And how the Father sent Christ was described long ago by the prophet Isaiah in the 61. chapter, where it reads: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the

opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." With such instructions Christ was sent, and now declares that in no other way will He send His disciples. He entrusts to them the office of preaching, that it may remain in force even to the end of time, and He orders them to preach just as He preached while in the flesh. This command then, and this mission to preach, has reference only to the doctrine to be taught; the disciples are instructed to preach no other doctrine than that which Christ Himself proclaimed.

The character of this doctrine is clearly and beautifully expressed by the prophet Isaiah when he describes Christ as anointed, and sent to cheer the downcast and the timid, to comfort the broken-hearted. All other preaching is erroneous and surely not as Christ enjoined; it is Mosaic in its nature. Moses preached in such a style that the fearful, timorous hearts were yet more affrighted and became still more disconsolate; the preaching of Christ, however, aims to comfort the distressed. His teaching was new, as the works which He accomplished, the like of which the world had never witnessed before, were new, namely, that the Son of God suffered, died and arose again. Christ here fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah; for thus we read in the words of our text: "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Here we have the right definition of the powers of the spiritual kingdom, which is as far removed from the nature of the governments of this world

as the heavens are from the earth. They who execute the authority of this spiritual kingdom are true kings, real potentates and mighty rulers. But their government is not absolute; we learn from our text how it is limited. It extends, indeed, over the entire world, as the words clearly indicate, yet it is confined in its operations to the sins of men. It has nothing to do with money or lands, with food or raiment, nor with anything pertaining to the outward life of man. Such affairs are regulated by emperors, kings, princes and other officers chosen for this purpose, whose duty it is to administer the secular governments, that men may live in prosperity and peace. The spiritual government concerns itself with the spiritual necessities of men, with their sins; where these are found, there this authority exercises its sway, and nowhere else.

It is a great mistake to mix these duties and powers, as the Pope and his bishops have done, who abused their spiritual authority and became lords of this world, even to such an extent that emperors and kings had to bow before them. Christ did not invest His disciples with any such authority; He did not ordain them to the administration of temporal governments, but to the office of preaching, thereby giving them authority over sin. The functions of the office of the ministry are therefore these: To preach the Gospel of Christ and to forgive sins to the penitent, desponding souls, but, on the other hand, to retain them to the impenitent and unbelieving.

This authority over sin has been miserably abused by the Pope; for by it he regarded himself privileged to make laws and regulations as he pleased,

not only for the Church, but also for the whole world, and thus did not at all regard the proper duties pertaining to the Office of the Keys. In this he greatly erred. It is not my duty as a preacher of the Gospel, as a messenger of Christ, to instruct you in your business affairs, in agriculture, in matrimony, or other similar transactions; God gave you your reason to guide you in all such matters. And if you should be in doubt as to this or that in regard to these things, you can go and ask advice of jurists, and other people, who are well versed in such affairs. My duty and office relates to your spiritual condition; I must tell you that you are a sinner, and that you would be eternally damned as such if Christ had not paid your debt and become your Saviour.

To understand this duty well it is simply necessary to know what sin is. "Sin" is not gold nor other similar possessions, not worldly authority, not our daily labor, not bread nor wine, nor anything of this kind, but it is a heavy burden which oppresses the heart and conscience before God, so that we are afraid of His wrath and await eternal damnation. We speak here of real sins, which God adjudges as such and which bring death, and not of those imaginary sins which the Pope and his jugglers, the bishops, have invented, such as the omission of fasting on certain days, the eating of meat, or the careless handling of certain monastic trappings. These are papistic sins, invented and ordained by priestcraft, but before God they are not sins, nor do they bring condemnation, for He gave no commandments relating to these matters. When we speak of sins in this connection we mean

real sins, actual transgressions of the law both human and divine, sins not designated as such by men, but by the Word of God, sins in which we are born and in which we live. With sins of this kind the apostles are here enjoined by Christ Himself to busy themselves, either to forgive them or to retain them by virtue of their office; but in other matters, temporal in their nature, they should not interfere. Every apostle, and every minister of the Gospel, is authorized to proclaim unto the sinners who will not repent and are obstinately wicked, that they are in the clutches of the devil and will be surely thrust into the jaws of hell; on the other hand, it is equally a part of their office to assure the penitent and believers that, because of the sufferings and resurrection of Christ, heaven and eternal life will be theirs. This authority and power rests in the Word of God, not in the person of those who preach it; hence their decision is valid, is acknowledged as such even by the devil, and will surely free from sin those who accept it in true faith.

This privilege and authority which the apostles have, yea, which every Christian has, to pronounce judgment respecting sin, is of such vast importance that all the powers of emperors and kings are as nothing compared with it. For this declaration is as powerful and sure as if Christ Himself proclaimed it; for thus He says: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

Thus we see how the power of the Church and her authority are only to be employed in relation to sin; they meddle not with matters of State, with

temporal concerns, but address themselves to the fears and burdens of the conscience, which accuses and convicts before God. Again we learn from this, how carefully we should guard against treating certain things as sinful in which there is no transgression; for if we do, we are, as I have said above, guilty of inventing sins which are spurious, and the result would be that, in order to escape their imagined horrors, we would seek refuge in a righteousness which is also a sham and spurious. Let us therefore understand this well: sin is the transgression of the law of God and accuses mightily. A failure to comply with popish whims and regulations is not sin; God does not regard it as such.

But, alas, it is only too evident how many people live in actual, great and open sins, in avarice, adultery, theft, usury, anger, envy, drunkenness, blasphemy, and the like. They are hardened in their sins and perfectly indifferent. There is no lack of sins, but there is a lack of their acknowledgement and of repentance. Here then there can be no application of the authority to release; here it is necessary to bind. This power is mentioned in the words: "And whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

It behooves us therefore to make a correct distinction in regard to sin. Some sins are such both in the sight of God and in our own sight. Some sins, however, are such only before God, not in our eyes, that is, we are ignorant of them, and therefore do not concern ourselves about their remission. David says: *Tibi peccavi*, "Lord I have sinned

before Thee and have done evil in Thy sight." In these words he confesses his wrong and the conviction that it is displeasing in the sight of God. He says in fact: I see and feel my sin, not only in thought, but in my experience of its dreadful power; it is a terrible burden, the very devil himself, who comes to accuse me before God and to drag me away into hell and everlasting death. St. Paul, Rom. 7, speaks thus of this condition: "For without the law sin was dead, for I was alive without the law once," that is, sin is ever within us, but without the coming of the law it does not disturb us, we are at ease as to the consequences. Hence we continue upon the path of evil, committing sin upon sin, without any fear of God or thought of amendment.

But as soon as the thunder of the law penetrates the heart, the conscience is aroused and becomes aware of sin; then we realize what a horrible, destructive power sin is, how it robs us of God and hands us over to the devil and consigns us to hell. Hence the apostle continues: "But when the commandment came sin revived, and I died, and the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.'

This is the true sin, which is such both before God and in our own sight. Thus David, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, was at first careless as to the sin of which he was guilty; it slept, yea it was yet dead. But when Nathan came and thundered into his heart the words: "Thou art the man who art guilty of death before God," sin began to revive in David's soul. Nathan

however comforts him with the promise: "Thou shalt not die."

Thus we see how the authority of the apostles is not applied in worldly affairs, which merely pertain to the outward life of man, nor only to such transgressions as the civil government judges and punishes, but that it exerts its power over sin, which is regarded and held as such by God and man. Yea, the sins of the whole world are thus under the control of the apostles and of all ministers of the Gospel, even of every Christian in case of necessity; so that we can be fully assured of the forgiveness of our sins when our pastor, or, in case of his absence, when any Christian declares it unto us in the name of Jesus Christ. Such a declaration will be as valid as if Christ were personally present to pronounce it, or had sent an angel from heaven to proclaim it unto us.

Such authority and power is however not given to the apostles and ministers that they on that account should be overbearing and proud. It is not their own power which they exercise; they are simply servants of God to bring help to their fellow-men, to rescue them from the mighty thralldom of the enemy of their souls' salvation. It is a great and glorious achievement when a man, himself a poor, miserable sinner, exercises this power and puts to flight an enemy so strong that otherwise the whole world combined could not rout him. Christ says: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," and again: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Since then these words: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," are so plain, no one should

doubt that his sins are really forgiven as soon as the absolution is pronounced.

For this reason we so frequently exhort you to apply these glorious gifts which Christ has left to His Church and never to despise them. Christ has instituted the office of the ministry to battle against sin and to remit it wherever it really exists and is confessed in true faith. With those so-called sins, invented by men, we have here nothing to do; we mean sins which are such and which move the heart with terror.

Adam preaches the same doctrine to his son Cain, in Genesis, where he tells him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Thou art a sinner, but art not aware of it: sin, as it were, slumbers, but in a very unquiet place; if it is aroused thy condition will be greatly changed. Sin, though dormant now, will not sleep on forever; it will awake and torment thy conscience with terrible stings, driving thee to despair. Those persons who do not concern themselves about sin are sinners indeed, but they cannot be absolved; their sins will be retained, for they desire no remission and prefer to continue in their evil ways.

The doctrine of the papists in this regard was: Let him who desires forgiveness meditate upon his sins and be penitent. On this penitence they then based the remission of sins. It is possible that this practice arose from an imitation of the example of the fathers, who insisted upon it, just as we now do, that whosoever wished to be absolved must first be truly penitent and ready to confess his sins. This is right, and just as it should be; but it is

entirely false when such penitence is regarded as meriting forgiveness, when it is made the ground of the remission of sins. Penitence has no merits; it is simply a realization of the enormity and power of sin, which makes itself felt in the heart. Hence it is wrong to trust in penitence, as if it were sufficient to bring remission of sins.

Previous to this penitence there is no account made of sin. It is indeed present, but man is dead to it; it sleeps; it is sin deprived of vitality, as Adam tells Cain in the words quoted above. But when sin revives and makes itself felt, it disturbs the heart and conscience; yet we cannot call these manifestations a meritorious work; it is simply, as St. Paul calls it, living sin. And surely, it would be foolish to assert that sin can merit grace.

The people under the papacy were therefore greatly deceived when absolution was given them on account of their penitence, as being some merit or good work. All the papal bulls conveying forgiveness of sins are directed to the "*contritis et confessis*," to the penitent and those who have made a confession. Penitence, if real, is nothing but sin acknowledged, and surely there is no merit in this. We have remission of our sins when we have faith in the words of Christ, and accept implicitly the declaration made in His name, that our sins are forgiven, not on account of our penitence, which is only sin experienced and confessed, and on which we can build no hope of remission, but on account of the Word of Christ, in which we trust.

Mere penitence, or feeling sin, has the effect to drive us away from faith and from God, of whom we are afraid. This makes sin more terrible and

more effective, and causes in the end agony and despair, which is but a multiplication of sins. The thief, who has fallen into the hands of the executioner, increases his crimes by adding to his theft a revengeful feeling against those in authority and against God. St. Paul speaks pertinently of this, Rom. 7, when he says: "Sin by the commandment becomes exceeding sinful," that is, sin becomes strong and overwhelming in its effects. This they called penitence, when to one sin many others were added, so that the whole world is filled with sins, and peace and rest are nowhere to be found. Where the heart is in such a condition as this, despair must follow. Judas the betrayer had such penitence as this. Christ, with His cheering word and command respecting the remission of sins, must also be present, else all is dark and hopeless.

Where there is penitence and fear, Christ approaches and says: Thou art full of sins, and in misery turnest away from me; I cannot absolve thee on this account. Penitence and sorrow are necessary, for without them there can be no sincere hatred of sin and no longing desire to be freed from it; but do not confine thyself to this lamentation; come to me, hear and accept my word in true faith, and thou shalt have remission of sins.

This indeed was not the style of preaching among the papists; they sent the penitent to St. James, to Rome, or other sacred places, telling them to trust in their penitence and to do good works. The word and commandment of Christ in reference to the remission of sins was entirely disregarded by them. But this command stands here immovable: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto

them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." This is plain enough. Nowhere else but in the words of Christ our Saviour can we find forgiveness of our sins. Go for this purpose wherever else you please, you will surely go amiss. What did we gain by it when we tortured ourselves with fasting, singing, prayer, vigils, reading mass, and the like? Were our sins remitted on that account? Surely not. Is it not a shame and an abomination that we were taught to seek remission of sins by means of penitence, which by itself is only sin aggravated? If my works, my penitence and confessions can do it, of what value is the word of Christ, and what need is there of His command in regard to the remission of sins? We might as well be Jews and Turks, who also desire to be saved, though they reject Christ. The Pope is really worse than the Turk and Jews, because he abuses the name of Christ in teaching his false doctrine.

We ought ever to remember that Christ makes remission of sins dependent upon His Word, and not upon pilgrimages, masses, alms or other so-called good works, of whatever kind they may be. Whoever now desires remission of sins, let him go to his minister or to some other fellow Christian who has God's Word, and he will surely find consolation there. It is certain that by no exertions of our own can we overcome sin, and everything we do, even if we torture ourselves to death, will be in vain. This was often experienced in popery. When one was troubled in his conscience and went into a monastery, or performed some other penitential work, for the purpose of earning peace and

happiness, he had to confess that neither cowl, nor rosaries, nor fasting, nor other penances, could in the least remove his misery or ease his conscience.

We know the reason of this failure. Christ tells us in our text that sins are remitted or retained through His Word. He whose sins are not remitted by this Word, because he hears it not, has them retained by the same Word; for this is the only means whereby sins are effectually dealt with. You may therefore do what you please, your sins will be retained if you depend on your own works and despise these words of Christ. The Lord our God made forgiveness of sins contingent on no work that we might perform, but on the great work which Christ accomplished when He died for the world, and for our benefit arose from the dead. The application of this His work He makes through the Word which He entrusted to the apostles, to the ministers of the Gospel, yea, to every Christian, authorizing them to declare unto all who seek it the remission of sins.

Thus we have pointed out to us the only way in which we can surely find remission of sins. The command has been issued long ago to remit sins, and in the Word we are sure to find this remission. If we seek it not there, our sins will be retained, do what we may; for, as has been repeatedly said, there is no remission except in the Word of Christ. This Word, however, has been entrusted to the apostles and all Christians, and they are to apply it; he who seeks any other remedy for the ills of sin, shall not find it, no matter what he may do to accomplish that end. This divine declaration, that sin is removed by the Word alone, without the

assistance of any works, stands firmly fixed; it must be heeded by us, or we have no remission.

This, however, has not only reference to absolution, but, as we mentioned already in the beginning of our sermon, to all the functions of the holy ministry. Christ declares in the words of our text that remission of sins shall be proclaimed and imparted by the preaching of the Word and by the holy Sacraments. The object of preaching the Gospel is to bring men to a knowledge of their sins, that they may become pious and just. We are baptized that through the death of our Lord our sins may be forgiven, and Christ has instituted His Supper that we may truly believe that His body was sacrificed for us and that His blood was shed in our behalf and therefore have no doubts of the remission of our sins. To strengthen our faith in this forgiveness of sins, Christ so ordained it that each one must receive the Sacraments for himself; it will not answer to baptize one for many, nor to administer the Lord's Supper to one as the representative of others; each one must himself enjoy these blessings. In like manner each one must for himself hear the Word and seek absolution, if he desires to be comforted thereby. Let no one doubt, when the declaration of remission of sin in Jesus' name is pronounced, that it is true and that all his sins are removed, yea that he is released from them also in heaven and in the sight of God.

The Word and the Sacraments therefore belong together; for Christ has included the Sacraments in the Word. Without the Word we could not be comforted by the Sacraments; we would not even know what they are. It is consequently not only

a great blindness and error, but also a terrible abuse, when the papists preach remission of sins regardless of the Word upon which all depends, and delude people by directing them to seek absolution through penances and works of their own.

But, because the remission of sins is communicated through the Word, which, as has been frequently said, was entrusted by our Lord to the Church and her ministers, yea, unto all Christians, that it should be preached, it follows that this remission of sin must be believed, and that there is no way of obtaining it, except by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the very foundation of our creed. The word of Christ, which He gave to His disciples, can certainly not be seized with the hands nor by any self-imposed works, such as fasting, prayers, giving of alms and the like; faith alone can appropriate it, and the heart alone is the proper receptacle for it. It is evident and certain that we are justified only through faith, because remission of sins comes through the Word, and the Word can be received only by faith.

Of this the Pope and his party are ignorant; yea, they are so hardened that they refuse to learn it. They have put aside both faith and the Word, and have told the people to depend on their own works, on their piety and merits. Would that God might silence these fellows with their false doctrines. It behooves us, however, to remember this papistic doctrine with all its horrors, and to compare it with the true doctrine which we preach, else we are in danger of falling again into error, and of again seeking remission of sins by our own

works. Christ directs us to His Word and away from our works; He makes His Word powerful and has it preached by His disciples, whom He sends even as He was sent by the Father.

Where there is forgiveness of sins and the hearts, as St. Peter says, are purified by faith, there good works will surely follow, proceeding from a sanctified source. Faith slumbers not, and the Holy Ghost ever prompts to obedience to God's Word and to a warfare against flesh and sin. May God grant us grace, through Christ Jesus, both to believe and to experience this truth. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(MISERICORDIAS DOMINI.)

JOHN 10, 11-16 I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth ; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father : and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

This Gospel, like other works of Christ, may be considered in two aspects, as teaching first faith, and secondly love. To our faith the fact is presented that Christ is the Shepherd, the only one who lays down His life for His sheep. No human being, no saint, no angel could accomplish the great work of redeeming fallen man, whom the devil, through the sin committed in paradise, had hurled into death ; Christ alone could be this Redeemer through His death. This was this Shepherd's proper work, which no one else can imitate, as little as any other of His works done for our salvation can be equaled.

No one can therefore appropriate to himself the words which Christ here uses : "I am the good Shepherd : the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." With these words He would teach us to trust in Him, to regard the sufferings of all the saints as naught when compared with His sufferings in our behalf. Moses, the prophets and the apostles were eminent men, true and watchful

shepherds and rulers among the people of God; they taught and preached aright what it behooved men to believe and to do; they also suffered much on that account, the most of them even dying the martyr's death; yet notwithstanding all this they can in no wise be compared with Christ. He is the Only Begotten of the Father, the Lord of glory, the true and only Shepherd over all, who from the foundation of the world spake through the patriarchs and the prophets, and in the fullness of time became man, revealing His Father's will. He indeed "laid down His life for the sheep," for all who believe in Him, who trust in Him in life and in death, assured that in Him there is redemption from the power of the devil who held the whole human race in the bondage of sin and death. He also established an everlasting Church throughout the world, and keeps it through His Word, continually increasing her boundaries, that His name may be hallowed and worshiped and confessed. To this end He gave unto the Church His Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who protects her by power divine against the wrath, fury and murderous assaults of the devil and his servants. And though very many lose their life as martyrs of their faith and confession now, yet will they, in the great day of resurrection, be brought by Him into life eternal with all the elect, where there is inexpressible joy and happiness unalloyed; and this to the utter confusion and everlasting shame of His enemies and theirs.

All this no angel can accomplish, much less a man, though he be a patriarch, a prophet, or an apostle. Moses, all the prophets, the apostles and

other faithful shepherds, when they had finished their preaching and had performed their duties well, passed away in death; Christ, however, is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Therefore He is a different Shepherd from all others who have watched the fold of Christ. These may indeed have faithfully guarded the flock entrusted to them, and may have fed their sheep on the true Word of God, directing them to Christ as the great Shepherd of souls; nor did they flee and leave their flocks unprotected when the wolf was seen approaching, but bravely met him, defending their herds, when necessary, even at the sacrifice of their own lives; yet with all this devotion to their sheep, their shepherds could not take away from them their sins, nor free them from death. Christ, the great Shepherd, alone could and did do this through His own death. Others might indeed lay down their life as a testimony to the truth of the word which they preached, and to confirm their people in the pure doctrine which they taught from God's Word, but more they could not accomplish thereby. Of this more anon.

Even if we have nothing to fear from the enemies of God's Word, if we preach it in its purity, or refuse to hear the voice of a stranger, if our body and life is secure from persecution and murder, yet it behooves us to take good heed against the most dangerous wolf, the devil, that he may not pounce upon us and tear us into pieces in a much more dreadful manner than earthly tyrants do, who indeed can slay the body, but are not able to injure the soul. To escape this wolf we dare not depend upon our holy life, upon our good works and

righteousness, not even upon the fulfillment of the law of God. The law is of no avail in this regard; it even causes us sorrow, by accusing us in our conscience of our faithlessness and many shortcomings in the sight of the Lord our God. It shows us our disobedience, our want of love and confidence, thus pronouncing against us the sentence of eternal damnation. Much less will our vows, our chastity, our penances, and whatever other works we might do, avail us anything; they are works of our own choosing, often contrary to the Word and will of God; therefore we cannot rely upon them.

We must absolutely dispense with all self-made consolation and learn to depend entirely, in unshaken faith, upon Him who says in our text: "I am the good Shepherd, and I lay down my life for my sheep." He does not flee before the wolf; He would rather die under the teeth of the wolf than suffer him to destroy even the smallest of the flock. Hence we ought to rely on Him in this great danger and seek alone His mighty defence. We must have faith to do this; we can do nothing of ourselves in this regard; Christ has done all and does all for us, and commands us to accept His merits in our behalf with true, unwavering faith.

The other lesson is that the example of our great Shepherd is set before us for our imitation, as St. Peter writes, 1 Pet. 2: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead unto sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye

were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Of this doctrine, pertaining to faith more directly, he makes an application to our daily life and the practice of love toward others, when he says in the same chapter: "Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps." As Christ died for us, to save us from death and condemnation by His own sacrifice, without any price paid by ourselves, thus it behooves us to serve one another, regardless of pain and sacrifice. Thus the example of Christ is followed, and thus every Christian becomes a good shepherd. If I cannot by my death rescue others from damnation and sin, for, as we have seen above, Christ the great Shepherd can alone do this, I can nevertheless set others a bright example of the power of faith even in death, so that they may come to Jesus and learn to know Him as their Saviour. The world and the devil certainly are deadly enemies of the Gospel, and so is the Pope, who exerts all his power to crush the efficacy of the Word. Hence faithful shepherds must be prepared for persecutions, and be ready, if necessary, to lay down their life in defence of the truth.

Pious, faithful pastors are needed, who are sure of their redemption in Jesus Christ and are ready to follow the example given by Him, even to die for their flock and to lay their heads on the block as martyrs of the Word. Such a devotion to truth saves not others, it is true, for salvation comes alone by the death of Christ ; but it serves to confirm the faith of the brethren. Thus God is glori-

fied in my death, and my brother is strengthened in his faith by my blood, though it has no saving power. Salvation can come only through the death of the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as we have repeatedly stated.

In this connection we must not forget that false teachers and tyrants, who persecute the pure doctrine and condemn it, are called wolves. A true Christian, however, will not be frightened when the wolf comes, nor will he permit his neighbor to be deprived of the Word and true knowledge of Jesus; he would rather lay down his life than to have others deprived of these blessings, as the apostles and the martyrs did, who did not flee from the wolf, but resisted him to the last.

So it should still be. He who wishes to be a minister of the Gospel must have his whole heart in the calling, earnestly desirous of the glory of God and the welfare of his fellow men. If this is not the only aim one has in this holy office, if he looks to external gain or loss, he is simply not fit to be a minister of Christ. He is either a coward who disgracefully flies when the wolf comes, leaving the sheep unprotected at the mercy of the enemy, as our Lord says: "A hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth;" or he is afraid boldly to speak the truth and suffers the flock to wander away from the good pasture, without preaching to them the Word of God. They who preach for outward gain, for money, and are not content with their daily bread, which God kindly gives, are nothing but hirelings. We

preachers must be satisfied if we have an adequate support; if we long for more we are hirelings who care not for their flocks. A true shepherd will sacrifice all, even his life, for the welfare of those entrusted to his care.

This example of the good Shepherd is however not merely given for those who are in the office of the ministry, but for all Christians. It is a duty pertaining to all, to make a bold confession of their faith and rather to die than to abjure the Word and to commit idolatry. They know that if they must yield up their life on earth they have a good Shepherd, through whose death for them they shall live for evermore.

Christ continues His discourse by speaking of His sheep, distinguishing them from others. He points out His truth as distinct from heresy and all other doctrine, saying: "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." The meaning of these words is: If you wish to be my sheep, all depends upon your really knowing me, your Shepherd; no harm can then befall you. It is therefore an urgent duty of every true preacher of the Gospel to preach Christ, and Him alone, so that people may learn to know Him as to His person and His blessings, keeping His Word and honoring Him alone as the good Shepherd who laid down His life for them. To impress this truth upon the hearts of the people, to present to them their Shepherd, is an imperative duty of every Christian minister.

Then we must also urge the example presented, that as Christ willingly gave Himself up and suffered for us, so we ought to be ready to endure and suffer every ill and persecution for the Word's sake. Both these points we must preach to our people. Whoever hears and practices these lessons is a sheep in the fold of Christ, for He has said: "My sheep hear my voice." If we preach and teach this truth we are good shepherds, though we cannot die for the sheep as Christ did.

Those persons who will not hear this preaching, or who as preachers will not proclaim it to their flock, are not good shepherds, but even the best of them are hirelings and ravenous wolves. Such preachers ought not to be indulged; we ought to avoid them like the very devil. Yet the Pope is just such an one. He teaches falsely and denies that Christ is the only good Shepherd who can save from death, when he directs people to be their own shepherds, to flee from the wolf by virtue of their own good works. Thus they preach in the Pope's church the necessity of the mass, of pilgrimages, of monastic practices, and the like.

If we are to be true Christians we must heed the Word of Christ, even as a sheep heeds the words of its shepherd, while it disregards the language of a stranger. We therefore say to the Pope and his preachers: We know not your voice; you are wolves intent on our destruction; depart, and hush your howlings; we follow only the voice of our good Shepherd.

Christ says: "They shall hear my voice," and again: "A stranger will they not follow, but will

flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." It is impossible that a sheep which has heard and understood the voice of the good Shepherd, and in whose heart faith has found an abiding place, should yet heed a doctrine which is contrary to the words of Christ. We indeed heed the laws of kings and princes, the regulations of municipalities and the like, because they pertain only to this temporal life; they have nothing to do with our salvation, for no compliance with the laws and regulations of this world can bring us into life eternal. If therefore any preacher comes, not as an official of the powers of this world, but professedly in the name of God, and tells us that we must do penance for our sins, and that we can be saved by means of the mass, by doing charitable works, &c., we answer him: Thou art a cheat; we know not thy voice; it sounds like the voice of a wolf.

Experience has taught that a sheep is gifted by nature above other animals with a most acute distinction of sounds. Among ten thousand people it recognizes its shepherd by the sound of his voice and follows him; and if ten thousand sheep are collected in one flock and all the ewes are bleating, each little lamb knows the voice of its mother, and runs to meet her.

Christ, no doubt, has reference in our Gospel to this peculiarity. He would say: I also have such lambs; I am their Shepherd and they are able to distinguish my voice and to follow it. Nor will they obey if any other voice calls them. If we

therefore desire to be His sheep, we must have this sure faculty of hearing and must be able to distinguish His voice from every other, however pleasant, clear and friendly this may be.

We should therefore learn from this Gospel and earnestly endeavor to practice it, that we must hear the Word of God and be firmly grounded in it against the allurements of the devil, who is an unceasing tempter to everything evil, and who is ever prepared to lead us to destruction, and against every form of false doctrine. The wolf is full of cunning; if he cannot overcome you with false doctrine, he will try to do so by instilling wicked thoughts into your heart. Then is the proper time for us to say: I heed not this voice; it is that of the wolf and not that of my Shepherd; my Shepherd's voice tells me: "I am the good Shepherd: and I lay down my life for the sheep;" but thou wolf wouldst fain induce me to fear Him and to run away from Him. If we can meet the enemy with such determination, we will succeed in expelling him from our presence; yea, the devil will then desist from oppressing our hearts and from the attempt to lead us astray; he will not succeed in making us afraid or despondent.

If we thus become thoroughly acquainted with the voice of our good Shepherd, if we can distinguish Him by it among a thousand, we will then know Him well and He in return will know and love us. How, indeed, could He be our enemy who gave His own life that we might live forever, and who rescues us from sin, death and every evil? No

other voice but His will give us such comfort; therefore we must heed it well.

These expressions of Christ in our text are still further so cheering and consolatory, because He calls Himself a Shepherd, and us, who have and hear His Word, His sheep. No Christian can now reasonably complain that he is forsaken. It may be that one is in need of money and earthly property; another may be deprived of health; and a third may want something else, so that it might appear that we were in the midst of wolves and without a shepherd, as Christ also says: "Behold, I send you as sheep into the midst of wolves." We can see it with our own eyes, every day of our life, how the Christian Church is in the condition of a sheep which the wolf has seized by its fleece and which he is about to devour. It may seem sometimes as if we were without a Shepherd. But thus it must be, else we would not seek our only comfort in our true Shepherd's reed, which sounds so invitingly when Christ says: "My sheep know my voice."

If we obey this voice and follow it, we can then truly say that we know our Shepherd and that we are known of Him. Nor can the devil injure him who heeds and follows the Word of the good Shepherd. No matter what may betide our person under the providence of God, or our possessions, or our household, we will ever hear the voice of our Shepherd, who cheers us with these words: Ye are my dearly purchased flock who know my voice and who I am; I will not forget you. Such recognition has its foundation in the Word and in faith; on

none other can it rest; therefore Christ declares: "I know them even as the Father knoweth me and I the Father."

When Christ, the Son of God, yet walked on earth, it often seemed as if He was entirely in the power of the devil and his imps, so that they could practice upon Him all their malicious pranks at pleasure. God had apparently deserted Him. But when Christ in great agony exclaims: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," when He died upon the cross and was buried, and the devil really thought that Christ had no God, then it was manifest that the Father knew Him well, for He leads forth His Son from death and hell.

Even so, Christ declares, shall it be with you, my sheep. Be not confounded, though it seems at first as if I knew you not. A Christian must, while yet on earth, endure many misfortunes, sorrows, sins and all kinds of miseries, as though there were no difference between him and the wicked. His life and death, outwardly viewed, have nothing peculiar; it even seems, now and then, that God leads the Christian through much severer trials than if he were a heathen; he certainly has more conflicts with temptations and other tribulations of the soul. But be not disconcerted thereby; remember what thy Shepherd has said: "I know my sheep."

Ah, say the devil and our unhallowed reason, why do we fare so badly if we are sheep of Christ's fold? We answer: It is nevertheless a fact that He knows us, nor will we waver in this faith, though death and misfortune visit us. We know His voice and hear it plainly, declaring unto us in

the tones of a shepherd to his lambs: I am your Shepherd, who laid down His life for you. These words we hear and believe, and thereby have a certain proof that we know Him and are known of Him. Nor shall our experience in life change this conviction. Troubles here on earth are but temporal, but His Word assures us of life eternal. What matters it if we must die, just like those who believe not in Christ? The voice of our Shepherd comes to our ears in the most friendly tones with the assurance: "Whosoever believeth in me, shall never die;" and again: "I lay down my life for the sheep." On account of these declarations we are fully convinced that our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, knows us and that we are safe in His care.

This recognition, however, does not yet become manifest, so that faith may be exercised; for if by means of Baptism we were entirely exempt from impurity and death, we would have no need of the Word nor of faith. But because the Word still remains, it must be accepted in faith, and not by experience, until that final day when faith shall cease and everything shall be seen and experienced.

Beyond all doubt, man becomes through Baptism pure and beautiful before God, even as the sun itself; no sin remains in him; he is fully justified, as Christ says: "He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved." This, however, is not perceptible to the eye; but it is true according to the Word and ordination of Christ. It is therefore all-important that we exercise implicit faith in the Word, that we do not in the least deviate from it, convinced that in the life to come all that we now hear

through the Word and believe will be manifest in the bliss of eternal life. As this life and the life after death are essentially different, it is impossible fully to experience here on earth what we shall feel and understand hereafter.

It therefore exceeds our skill to distinguish beyond all mistake a Christian from other men. Who, indeed, can assert that he has eternal life? And yet we must declare it as a simple fact, that a child, which by nature is oppressed with death, sin and other ills, which show nought of eternal life, begins eternal life at the time of its Baptism. How is this possible? No change is perceptible, indeed, in the mode of life; yet God has substituted for the former life of sin and corruption an eternal life, beginning already in this world, and this new life is a reality, according to the Word and to faith, though we neither see nor feel it now.

Consequently, if we wish to know who is a Christian, we must not judge by the outward appearance, but by the Word. A sheep lives because it hears the voice of its shepherd, for surely as soon as it disregards this voice it will go astray and becomes a prey to wolves. The only safety is in the neighborhood of the shepherd; therefore that sheep which hears the shepherd's voice is secure. Just so the Christian. If he does not hear the Word of Christ he has no consolation; if he faithfully heeds this Word he has everything that Christ achieved for him, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Then he will be filled with hope and joy every day of his life. In the midst of his labors and in the performance of his daily duties, while he

eats and drinks and works, yes even while he suffers pains, which are also ordained of God, he realizes that he is a sheep in the fold of Jesus; to His voice he listens, and judges his life not according to what he sees and feels, but according to the words of Christ: "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Let us learn this lesson and accustom ourselves to accept calmly the fact that Christians must yet suffer and die like other men. It is true Christian wisdom and a precious acquirement if we can say: In the outward, daily life and experiences of men, we see no difference between Christians and unbelievers, unless it be this, that the faithful often endure much more sorrow and misfortune than the others, yet we know that a great difference exists between them, in their relation to the Word, so that the Christian is distinguishable from the infidel not by his features, nor even by his apparent piety, but by his having and hearing the voice of his Shepherd. Heathens, Turks, Jews, hypocrites and false Christians, who propose to earn their salvation by their own good works, do not hear nor heed this voice; nor do the tyrants and the unchristian, Epicurean multitude, nor the Pope with his sycopants, know this Shepherd's call, which is heard and understood alone by the lambs and sheep of the fold of Jesus. Otherwise, in external appearance and temporal avocations, there is no difference.

The meaning of the words of Christ: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also

must I bring, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd," became evident on the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel began to be preached by the apostles to all the world. This Gospel still continues its conquests throughout the world, but we must not expect all men to accept its teaching and to be saved; this will never happen; the devil prevents it. The world is opposed to the Word and refuses to be admonished, therefore various beliefs and religions will continue to exist. "One fold and one Shepherd" simply means that God will for Christ's sake receive all as His dear children, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, who believe the Gospel. The only true religion is, to follow this Shepherd and to hear His voice.

May our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the only and true Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, grant us this faith; unto whom be honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(JUBILATE.)

JOHN 16, 16-23. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do you inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing.

Our text is a portion of those parting words which Christ addressed to His disciples, while He was seated with them at the table, in the evening before His betrayal by Judas into the hands of the Jews. He wished the disciples to understand their duty and to regulate their actions accordingly, after their Master would be given over into the hands of His enemies, and therefore tells them that, although they would be sad and would mourn at the event, they should yet be comforted, inasmuch as the separation would not be of long duration, and that they should see Him again in a little while, after He had arisen from the dead, and that then their joy would be an everlasting one.

John tells us further how the disciples were puzzled at these expressions of Jesus, for they could not comprehend what He meant by the words "a little while;" nor did they understand their meaning after Christ had explained it to them. The same perplexity controls us in this regard; we cannot rightly apprehend this "little while;" for the very same obstacle which prevented the disciples from understanding these words lies before us and dims our vision.

When tribulation came, and when the disciples saw the horrible and pitiable death of their Master, they could not realize that this was to be but for a little while; they thought that this was the end of their Lord and of His work, and expected nothing else than persecution, suffering and death, even as it had happened to their Master.

They were far from believing that after two days their Lord would arise from the dead to an endless life, and would be their Redeemer from sin, death and hell, and give them finally everlasting life. Hence it happened to them, as St. John elsewhere relates, that on Easter they were gathered together with closed doors for fear of the Jews, and would not at all credit the report of Christ's resurrection, although the women, Peter and the other two disciples had seen Him. They were entirely incredulous as to the "little while" of this occurrence; they thought Christ would have to remain in death as other men, and this caused their great sorrow, else they would have cheerfully awaited His resurrection and would thus have been comforted.

We act repeatedly as the disciples do here. As soon as God permits a misfortune to befall us we

despond, and think that there is no remedy nor rescue possible from its weight. We are not prepared to exclaim or believe that, after a little while, God will mercifully and unexpectedly come to our assistance, and are therefore hopeless, fit only for complaint and lamentation. In this we err; for St. Paul says that we ought to rejoice in tribulation and be bold, both on account of the present help, which will surely come if we but believe the Word, and because tribulation is a certain trial by which we may know that we are God's children. Of this we shall treat further on.

Our text is therefore full of comfort, not only for the disciples, but for all Christians. They are exhorted to learn the meaning of the word *modicum*, which means "a little while," that they may apply it as a remedy in tribulation, knowing the truth of the comfortable assurance that the troubles shall last but for a little while, after which sorrow will pass away and joy and gladness take its place.

For the purpose of comprehending this consolation the better, we will now speak in general of crosses and sorrows. Our reason assumes that God, if He cared for us and loved us, would ward off all evil from us, whereas now troubles and miseries crowd in upon us from every side; hence the conclusion is that God has either forgotten us, or else He has become our enemy and cares no longer for us; for surely if it were otherwise He would deliver us from our grief and distress. But such thoughts are wicked, and since they are very apt to arise, we must guard against them by applying the Word in true faith, and by following its precepts and not our own thoughts. If we judge our experiences in

daily life aside from the light which the Word of God casts upon them, we shall inevitably become victims of error.

What says the Word in this connection? Not even a single hair shall fall from our head against the will of God. If we accept this declaration in earnest faith, we will conclude that neither the devil nor the world, no matter how powerful they are, can harm the Christian in the least, if it is not God's will that they should do so. Christ makes this plain in the parable of the sparrows; these are really useless birds, which do more injury than good, and yet not one of them shall fall to the ground and perish unless it be the will of the Father in heaven, Matt. 10. Now, if we have any confidence whatever in the words of Jesus, we must conclude from this that God will certainly concern Himself much rather for men than for many sparrows; He therefore will guard them well and will not permit the devil and the world to harm a single one of His Christians against His will. If troubles do come, we infer that God has first given His consent; for against His knowledge they could not arise. Let us well remember this truth, so that we do not think, when evils surround us, that we are forsaken of God; for He has not forgotten where we are, nor is He ignorant of our condition, though He permits sorrows to invest us.

Another still more dangerous thought arises frequently under such circumstances. We are prone to say: If the sufferings which we endure are providential, then surely God cannot be our friend; for if He were, He would not permit this misery to visit us, but would ward it off, and make us happy

and prosperous. Then comes the conscience in addition, with its accusations of our sins and misdoings, so that our condition becomes nearly desperate, and we are not far from hatred towards God, and turn away from Him to seek help somewhere else, where we are forbidden to go. We would more patiently bear our misfortune, and would regard it less burdensome, if the devil and wicked men had brought it upon us. Let us, then, hold firmly to God's Word and resist these subtle insinuations and arguments of our natural man; if we do not, we shall either fall victims to despair or become open enemies of God.

What says God's Word in regard to this? St. Paul writes, 1 Cor. 11: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." These words are plain: God chastens and disciplines those whom He would bring into eternal life; they suffer many severe trials of sorrow and of pain, of misfortunes and tribulations, yet God is their friend. Let us not forget these words of the apostle. We all have our griefs and pains, and if we candidly ask ourselves: Had this tribulation not come upon me, would I not have fallen into some other calamity or sin, and is it not better thus, when God by these trials keeps me in faith and brings me to His Word and keeps me at prayer?—I say, if we candidly look at our experience in this light, we shall surely find that God is not our enemy, even if He smites us, but that He in reality manifests His love toward us, and would by this discipline keep us from eternal misery.

In this sense does St. Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, cite the expression of Solomon, Proverbs 3: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." And in the same connection: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." These passages teach us that the stripes which are inflicted on us by the hand of God are prompted by His paternal love and not by His wrath. If therefore we feel the infliction, let us not suppose that God is angry with us or that He cares not for us. He disciplines us because we are children, that we may not fall short of the inheritance which He has in store for us.

This lesson concerning the purpose of sorrows and sufferings, which the Word teaches us, we also learn from facts and examples. Surely no one would have the presumption to assert that God Almighty, the Father in heaven, did not love His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; and yet

when we view His life and death, if we were to judge from mere external appearances, we would have to say that no love of the Father is manifest there, that He is hostile and cruel towards His Son and punishes Him with utter severity, while the wicked Jews, intent on malicious actions, are spared. It is as Isaiah says: "Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." And the Jews in mockery said to Him when He was crucified: "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."

If God thus willed it with His Son on earth, we need not wonder if the Christians have a similar experience. Christ says: "The servant is not above his master, if they have persecuted me they will also persecute you." And in the epistle to the Hebrews the apostle says very appropriately: "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Thus we see how Scripture and examples fully agree in this regard, wherefore we ought to recognize in our sorrows and sufferings God's good and gracious will, and not for a moment think that He has forsaken us. Our tribulation should become unto us a sure testimonial of the love of God to us, because we are assured by such visitations of our Father in heaven that we are His dearly beloved children.

Let us now consider the reason why God thus seemingly unmercifully chastises His children and keeps them smarting under the rod. St. Paul mentions the reason when he says: "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Likewise we read, Psalm 119: "It is good for me that I

have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes.” And Isaiah says in the 28. chapter: *Vexatio dat intellectum*, “It shall be a vexation only to understand the report.” We must admit that if God gave us everything we desired, if He warded off all misfortune from us, we would become so secure that we would not be troubled by our sins, nor would we think of God’s Word and of prayer. But when we are visited by various adversities we have occasion to resort to prayer and to call to mind how our sins have richly merited such chastisement, and we will thereby be prompted to an amendment of our conduct and to an earnest supplication that the affliction may be removed or moderated. This is the meaning of the words: “But our Father in heaven chastened us for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.”

If now the Christian is afflicted, he ought not to indulge in effeminate complaints and lamentations, but should remember that he has a merciful God in heaven, who has not forsaken him nor any of His children; who sends these trials and sorrows as reminders of man’s trespasses and as a call to repentance and to a more faithful obedience and filial love. If we are thus disposed our sorrows will be our gain, and we will be patient under them. Nothing can then move us to become fretful or to seek forbidden remedies; we will quietly await the help of God and pray for it.

Another lesson we must learn. If we know that no evil can befall us against the good and gracious will of God, we must also know and believe that He will find a rescue from our tribulation and will furnish present assistance. This consolation is fitly

expressed by the Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. 10: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." In full accord with this is the *modicum*, "a little while," of our text: "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy," yea, into a joy which is everlasting.

There are two prominent reasons why our faith in regard to this "little while" is often wanting or weak. We are apt to regard the affliction when upon us as too severe and are ready to succumb to it. Thus when the chief marshal of the king of Assyria demanded the surrender of Jerusalem, Hezekiah sent to the prophet Isaiah this message: "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth." The same figure of speech is used by our Lord in the text when He speaks of the woman in travail; apparently there is no help, mother and child must die. Thus the tribulations of the Christians are not insignificant nor easy to be borne, as we learn from the 69. Psalm, where Christ Himself exclaims in agony: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me."

The second reason why we are so desponding is contained in our inability to discover ways and means of escape from our miseries. We are quick to conclude that there is no help possible; we refuse to believe that the troubles will last but "a little while." To encourage us in this despondency the

Lord adduces in our Gospel the example of the woman in travail. When we view her in her distress it seems that there is no help for her, she must perish; but in a moment all is changed; instead of death a twofold life succeeds: the mother is convalescent and a bright, healthy child is born into the world. All sorrow vanishes and rapturous joy ensues. Of this we have examples every day; for fatal results at child-birth, though now and then occurring, are nevertheless not frequent. Generally great happiness quickly succeeds pain and suffering, as Christ here says. This lesson we ought to lay to heart; for this purpose the Lord taught it to His disciples. When sorrows, tribulations and afflictions come, let us call to mind that they will continue only "a little while" and after that joy is ours. The apostle teaches this same lesson to the Hebrews when he tells them: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Because of the sudden and often unexpected change of sorrows into joy our tribulations are said to be but for "a little while." Again, because our afflictions are exchanged in the end for everlasting happiness, they are regarded as but for "a little while." What matters it though poor Lazarus suffers for ten or for twenty years, if after that he is to be eternally comforted? St. Paul says, Rom. 8: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And 2 Cor. 4: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment,

worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." And St. Peter says, 1 Pet. 1 : "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations : that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." And once more we read in the 5. chapter : "But the God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

If, therefore, we firmly believe that we here have to undergo ills which last but "a little while," we will be cheered even in sorrows. Hence it behooves us to trust implicitly in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, knowing that His Word is true, though misfortune and affliction overwhelm us for "a little while;" then will we be comforted in sorrows, even as a woman is comforted in travail by the thought that God will soon turn her pain into pleasure by the sight of the child which is born. We cannot have real joy and gladness without preceding pain and sorrow. Our reason may attempt to persuade us that such afflictions are certainly proofs of God's displeasure and indifference toward us, but we must not heed such insinuations; they are false. A woman in travail must have sorrow and anguish, else the new man cannot be born into this world. Thus God sends us afflictions that we may find a rescue from them, and then much gladness of heart.

The Lord most cheeringly tells His disciples what manner of joy awaits them in "a little while." He says: "I will see you again." This promise was fulfilled on Easter, when He did appear unto them in a new life glorified. Thus He appears unto us, and our hearts are glad, when we remember His death and resurrection, His victory over sin, death and hell in our behalf, so that we through Him might live evermore. This is true, unalloyed and everlasting joy, which turns away all sorrow and which cannot be taken away.

Let us therefore not be impatient or unbelieving when affliction comes, but let us hold fast to the comfortable assurance that though we suffer, it will be but for "a little while." Christ has arisen and sitteth at the right hand of the Father to check the devil with his tribulations and to make us happy for ever and for ever. God grant us this blessing through His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(CANTATE.)

JOHN 16, 5-15. But now I go my way to Him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

This is a delightful Gospel. It treats especially of that chief and all-important article of our faith from which we have our name Christians. Therefore we cannot sufficiently learn this lesson, though we hear it once a year; if it is to produce in our hearts a faith that is firm and fruitful, we must hear it often and practice it diligently.

This Gospel, like the one of last Sunday, is filled with words of consolation, which the Lord addressed to His disciples at the table, on that memorable evening before He was betrayed and made a captive. He now desired above all to prepare His disciples for the coming tribulation, so that they might not be offended at His pitiable, disgraceful death, but

might know what great blessings would result therefrom, and that thus they might be comforted.

Therefore, as they were cheered in the Gospel of one week ago with the declaration that their sorrows and tribulations would be but for a little while, after which eternal happiness should come, so they are strengthened in the text of to-day by the explanation of the necessity and importance of the death of their Lord and Master.

He says: "But now I go my way to Him that sent me; that is: To-morrow I shall be crucified and put to death, and yet no one among you asks me whither I go or why this takes place, but because I told you of it, your hearts are filled with sadness. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away;" it is done for your welfare. "For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you," and the power of darkness will retain its sway. "But if I depart I will send the Holy Ghost unto you." Christ wants us to learn and to know this, in order that His sufferings may neither offend nor frighten us, but may be unto us a source of consolation, since we know that by them the influence and tyranny of the devil was broken and the Holy Spirit was given and imparted unto us.

The Lord explains still further what the Holy Ghost would accomplish, what He would bring and teach us: "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Indeed a great task, so vast that its execution seems impossible. Not merely one school, or one village, or one city, or even several of them, but the whole world shall come under the influence and reproof of the Holy

Spirit. It must in truth be a mighty power which can accomplish such a task, and it must be sure of the necessary support. To the world belong all the descendants of Adam, emperors, kings and princes. All these are included among the number of those whom the Holy Ghost, through the preaching of the apostles and other ministers, is to reprove and admonish. He tells them: Ye are all sinners; not one of you is just or wise, whether you live in Jerusalem or in Rome, whether you are of high or low degree; you must all learn true wisdom of me, or not one of you will be saved. If you despise my teachings, you shall all go to hell, just as you are, with your entire baggage of self-righteousness, of holiness and good works. Thus, says Christ to His disciples, will the Holy Spirit execute His office of reproofing the whole world through you, the poor and despised preachers of the Gospel.

This reproof, however, is no idle sound, but dread reality. Christ says: "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." What now, if there is in the world no righteousness, no judgment, nothing but sin—what shall become of us? Hence the reproof of the Holy Ghost is for the world a terrible shock; we hear that we are the devil's own, with all our good works, and that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless the Holy Ghost removes our sins, makes us righteous, and frees us from judgment. Many passages in the Scriptures are of similar import. Thus St. Paul says: "God has concluded all under sin;" and again: "We were by nature children of wrath." Christ also says: "Unless a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." With

such words and declarations the Holy Ghost reprove the world of sin.

What is sin? Is it to steal, to murder, to commit adultery, and the like? Yea, these are indeed sins, but they are not those which are most prevalent and most grave. Many persons are not guilty of these manifest sins; but of that chief sin of which the Holy Ghost reprove the world, no one is free, else the Holy Ghost could not reprove the whole world. This great sin is the unbelief of the world, the refusal to believe in Jesus Christ. Nor does the world know anything of this sin before the Holy Ghost reprove the people of it through His teachings; the world considers only such deeds sinful as are contrary to the second table of the law. It knows nothing of Christ, and much less is it aware of the sin of not believing in Him. But we need not talk of the world in this regard; we find many among the Christians who do not consider unbelief a sin, much less an original sin. No one but the Holy Ghost can teach the world that unbelief is sin; He reprove all as sinners, no matter how some may attempt to cover up their faults by good works or to pass themselves off as pure under the tinsel of self-righteousness.

The Holy Ghost, therefore, preaches this truth that all men, without an exception, are sinners and cannot of themselves believe in Christ. This is, of course, strange preaching for the world. The world of itself is perfectly ignorant of the duty of having faith in Christ, the Son of man. Men suppose that they have fulfilled their duty if they can say with the Pharisee, Luke 18, that they are no murderers, no adulterers and no unjust persons.

But the Holy Ghost teaches otherwise and tells man: I know that this one or that one may lead an outwardly upright life, but still the great sin of unbelief nestles deep down in the heart of every one. If we are not reprov'd of this sin by the Holy Ghost, we will never discover it.

We must then infer from this that "every thing not concluded in faith is sin," whether it be monastic vows, or prayers, fastings, and giving of alms. Wherever faith in Christ is wanting, there the Holy Ghost must come with His reproof. There is no other way to be relieved from this sin but to believe in Christ Jesus the Saviour.

This is an overwhelming truth, and yet the Pope with his followers attempt to gainsay it. When they cannot remove the text itself, they say that it speaks *de fide formata per caritatem*, that is, of faith as formed by love. But this is a false interpretation of the text. Christ evidently speaks here of the great sin of unbelief in Him. Therefore, though there are ever so many works of love performed by man, if faith in Christ is wanting they will avail nothing, and he who performs them is nevertheless a sinner whom the Holy Ghost reproves on account of his sins.

Unbelief is therefore the principal sin, from which all transgressions take their origin. Wherever unbelief dwells, there faith in Christ is banished, and the result is that His Word is rejected; it is either treated with contempt or regarded as heresy and falsehood and therefore persecuted as if it were the word of the devil. From this other great evils spring: disobedience towards parents and those in

authority, neglect in the fulfillment of the duties of one's office and calling, indulgence in all kinds of lasciviousness and lawlessness; although a few, perhaps, may lead an unblamable life before men from fear of detection and of scandal. Such are the blossoms and fruits of this tree of unbelief; its growth is immense and cannot be checked except by the power of the Holy Ghost. Whosoever does not believe in Christ has not the Holy Ghost and cannot have a single good thought; and if perchance he performs some work not evil in itself, and proper, he does this in slavish fear and not from true, earnest obedience to God's Word. The world is consequently the devil's household, devoid of every thing good in word and in deed. It cannot be otherwise, since unbelief is the source of all evil.

We can therefore very appropriately describe the world as a crowd of men on earth who do not believe in Christ, but abuse and despise His Word, who internally and externally, with thoughts, words and deeds, kill, steal, rob, and practice all manner of wickedness, often abusing for this purpose the blessings and merciful gifts of God.

Christ in our text instructs His apostles, and all ministers of His Word, to battle against such iniquity, powerfully to reprove the world of sin by telling it unceasingly, as long as time lasts, that it has no part in the kingdom of Christ, because it does not believe in Him, but is assuredly the devil's property, not so much on account of outward, gross sins as on account of the source of all sin, unbelief. We cannot remedy this by becoming monks, nor by many good works, for as long as unbelief remains in our hearts we are accursed sinners beyond all

hope of redemption. The only remedy in this our desperate condition is to thrust aside our unbelief, to have faith in Christ, and in Him alone to find consolation against sin and death.

You have often heard, my beloved, what is meant by "faith." It is not simply a knowledge of Christ, nor a mere assent to the truth of His Word, but an earnest confidence in our hearts that what He did for the world was done actually for us, for our salvation. The devil knows well enough that Christ died, and his belief in this regard is as strong as that of the Papists; but he does not believe that this death occurred for him also and for his benefit. The Holy Ghost alone has the power to produce in the heart the confidence in Christ which accepts Him as a Saviour. Whosoever has not this faith, nor believes that Christ died for him to save him from sin and eternal death, is not a Christian and remains a sinner, even if he tortures himself to death with his so-called good works.

When thus the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin, He makes it manifest that everything in us is sin, and that we with all our good works and saintly life are after all in the sight of God naught but miserable, accursed sinners, if we do not believe in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore away with all hoods, tonsures, orders, and all similar human instrumentalities devised to obtain forgiveness of sins! It is a contradiction to say that Christ died for us, and at the same time to wear a cowl or to perform this or that work for the purpose of becoming pious and entering heaven. He who does not heed the reproof of the Holy Ghost, and does not accept Christ; evidently demonstrates thereby that he does

not regard himself as a sinner and that he has no faith in the Lord.

Again it is the office of the Comforter to "reprove the world of righteousness." This is also a hard saying. Sin the world has, that we know, but piety and righteousness it has none, nor does it know where or how to obtain them. What then is meant by this term "righteousness?" The world has indeed laws and tribunals of justice; even the old heathens had appropriate legislation and institutions in regard to civil duties and the execution of their laws. Surely, it cannot be wrong to inflict punishment upon thieves and murderers. Is not all this very just and proper?

Christ answers thus: Call the regulations of this life as you will, only call them not righteousness, which would be false; for here is not meant the righteousness of the jurists, but that indicated in the words: "Because I go to my Father and ye see me no more." This is an intricate expression, more difficult to be understood than the one in regard to our being sinners because we do not believe in Christ, and surely this is difficult enough for our natural man to comprehend. We suppose that we have within us natural powers which enable us to worship properly, to prepare ourselves for the reception of pardon, and to pray for it aright. Such supposition makes it even now impossible for the Papists to understand this declaration concerning faith in Christ. But still more incomprehensible is this expression concerning "righteousness." It declares that we are then pleasing in the sight of God when Christ goeth to the Father and we see

Him no more. And yet this statement is beautiful and forcible.

Why should we then laud or mention our works? Christ distinctly says in our text, that we cannot become righteous by virtue of our own exertions, but only because "He went to the Father." Here we find true righteousness. The world knows nothing of it, since the writings of men do not at all allude to it. We are taught by the wisdom of this world that if we keep the ten commandments, observe the laws of the land, and lead an honest, upright life, we are surely good, just and honorable people. In our text, however, we find nothing of all this, nothing of our own works; Christ speaks alone of what He does, of His work, that He goes to the Father and we see Him no more. This deed of Christ, and nothing else, is our righteousness.

If, then, we desire to be truly pious we must not rely on our works. It avails nothing if we become monks, and fast and watch and pray; but this avails everything, that we desire to be freed from our sins, and know and believe that Christ went to the Father in our behalf. How is it then with fasting, with prayers and good works—are they of no value at all? Good works are right and proper; we ought not to neglect them, inasmuch as God ordered them in the law; but they can never justify us or make us pleasing in the sight of God. Christ's going to the Father is the one and only cause of our redemption and justification, and we must look for no other.

This going of Christ to the Father includes His suffering and cruel death upon the cross, His ascension into heaven, and His sitting at the right hand

of God. We do not see this, but we believe it, and this precious fact makes us just. We have no righteousness in ourselves, but Christ becomes our righteousness because He goes to the Father; or in plain language: No one becomes righteous, blessed or free from sin, but through the sufferings and death and resurrection of Christ. Such force has the going of Christ to the Father.

Hence it is plain that the Papists teach falsely when they say that good works are necessary to salvation. It is right enough to demand of a Christian an upright life and good works, but to say that thereby we are justified and made righteous is a pernicious falsehood. Our text says distinctly that the going of Christ unto the Father brings true righteousness. The world knows nothing of this; the Holy Ghost alone teaches it.

When the Papists quote the expression of Christ: "If thou wouldst enter into eternal life keep the commandments," they misapprehend its meaning, and only prove that they do not understand what it means to keep the commandments of God. It is an indisputable fact that righteousness and eternal life were established by the departure of Christ from this world unto the Father, and they come from no other source. Nor shall the devil rob us of this conviction. He may perchance cause us fear and inquietude of conscience on account of our natural weakness and sinfulness, but he cannot deprive us of our hope and faith in Christ who went the way of perfect obedience to the Father, so that we might have righteousness in Him. This assurance cannot be overthrown by the devil; he may indeed hold up to us our sins, but all his

accusations will avail nought if we have in true faith Christ as our Saviour. Let this ever be our chief consolation.

But faith is here absolutely necessary. The great work of Christ is perfect, and it devolves upon us to apply it to ourselves by faith. If we believe, we have the benefits of this work; if we are unbelieving, it avails us nothing. Once for all: Our righteousness, if true, comes to us from without, from Christ and His meritorious death. This truth makes the heart firm, otherwise, if we had to depend upon our own merits and works, upon our penitence and penance, as the Papists teach, we would never be secure, and would have to live in constant dread of punishment. How indeed could we know when our repentance, our confessions, and penitential tasks are sufficient? Therefore Christ took from us the burden of this suffering and bore it upon His own shoulders, so that we can now implicitly depend upon it that His sufferings and His death are our righteousness. The Son of God Himself performs the work ordained of the Father unto our redemption from sin and death; He is the Lamb of God, as St. John speaks of Him; He is God Almighty, and therefore there is no room to doubt the efficiency of His work of salvation.

Thus we learn, my beloved, how peremptorily this text cuts off all hope of meriting righteousness by our own achievements, since it consists entirely in the going of Christ unto the Father. When once this righteousness is ours by faith, let us then endeavor, as much as possible, to do good works, and let us strive with all our might to be obedient

to God. But we will never be enabled to do even one good work if we have no true faith in Christ in our hearts, and if we lack confidence in His merits; for then our hearts are yet wicked and impure, and we have no forgiveness of sins because we have no faith.

The righteousness of the Christian is therefore a peculiar one and not understood of men, unless it is taught and revealed by the Holy Ghost. And even when thus revealed, it cannot be comprehended by our reason, but must be embraced by faith. When Christ says: "I go to my Father, and ye see me no more," He requires faith, else His words would have no meaning. The Christian's righteousness must be taught by the Holy Ghost; the righteousness of the world, however, can be exhibited by philosophers, by the secular government, by lawyers, by father and mother, and by all in authority. The Christian learns that everything without faith is evil, while the true, eternal righteousness is founded upon the departure of Christ to the Father, where we see Him not, but still have Him through faith as our Lord and Saviour.

Finally, our text tells us, that the Holy Ghost "will reprove the world of judgment." Christ explains fully what judgment is meant in this connection when He further states that "the prince of this world is judged." As the Holy Ghost reproves the world of sin because it does not believe in Christ, and of righteousness because it will not accept the comfortable fact that Christ went unto the Father, so He also reproves it "of judgment" because of its ignorance and fear in this regard, which is all its

own fault, since it will neither accept nor faithfully heed the Gospel of Christ. It is indeed a most distressing calamity to have sin and no righteousness, to be without consolation amid sin, death and every kind of misfortune.

To this fearful calamity Christ refers when He declares that it shall be the office of the Holy Spirit to preach concerning judgment, and to make known to all men the fact that "the prince of this world is judged," and has no longer the power to harm them who believe in Christ and depend on His going to the Father. The "prince of the world," for such he still is, may indeed, here and there, attack with his temptations and snares the believers, but he shall not prevail against them; he is judged; his stronghold and his panoply are wrenched from him, and he himself is bound, as St. Peter says, in the chains of darkness. Christ accomplished this overthrow; therefore Christians need no longer tremble before this prince and his power in the world; he is judged and has lost his authority.

The unbelievers are not aware of this. Sometimes they may make a start to become Christians and to believe, but if the world on that account begins to frown on them, they are frightened and fall away, as Christ explains in the parable of the seed upon the rock. With the Christians it is different; they hold fast in faith to the Gospel and heed intently the admonition of the Holy Ghost, not to fear, nor to despair in the agony and woe of sin, because the prince of this world is judged and is deprived of his supremacy. Another and mightier Lord is now in power, even Christ, who vanquished and chained the prince of this world. Be therefore

not disturbed nor frightened if this dethroned potentate and god of the world scowls, and gnashes his teeth, and champs, and threatens like a fiend; he is as impotent in his rage as a dog that furiously barks and dashes his chains to the right and to the left, eagerly intent to thrust his fangs into the limbs of the passer-by, who easily avoids the rush by stepping to one side of the mad but fettered beast. Just so the devil barks and rages against the Christians, but he is chained and cannot injure them if they have faith in Christ and are constant in prayer. But if we forget this and become careless, we are in danger of injury, or, at least, of great consternation by this hellhound, who, though in chains and unable to bite, can yet greatly terrify those who heedlessly approach him; for cross dogs do not always bark, but are also quiet at times, with evil intent.

They who have the office to preach the Word, and in the name of the Holy Ghost to reprove the world of sin and of righteousness, ought to cling firmly to this assurance, that the prince of this world is judged. The world cannot at all endure to be reprov'd of sin; people become enraged when told that they are sinners and devoid of righteousness. If then we come with our reproof, as it is our duty, the world begins to rage and howl in a perfect fit of frenzy. Were it not for the testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning the judgment of "the prince of this world," we preachers would often be frightened by such manifestations of the devil and would hold our peace. The term "Paracletus," which means a comforter, a helper, belongs therefore of right to the Holy Ghost. He cheers the

hearts in tribulations and danger, and makes them strong to hear and heed the fact that "the prince of this world is judged."

This then we consider to be the office of the Holy Ghost on earth, and the import of His preaching and instruction. Nor is there any doubt that he who refuses to accept this preaching and instruction as the best and most valuable treasure on earth, and would not give up his own life rather than to lose this boon, is no Christian. Life and property are temporal gifts, but this treasure is everlasting; it conveys to us eternal life. St. Paul says: "The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." We ought therefore greatly to rejoice at the going of Christ to the Father, of which He speaks in the text, and give thanks unto God continually, with the earnest prayer that He may mercifully retain in us this knowledge and increase it day by day, so that we may be freed from sin and be made partakers of eternal righteousness, and, finally, that we may be comforted in the assurance that the prince of this world is judged.

After having concluded His statement in regard to the office of the Comforter, Christ continues: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth."

You are aware, my hearers, how the Papists pervert this expression when they pretend to prove by it their innovations and institutions, saying that the Holy Ghost was their author, and that Christ in this passage prophesied of such work. This is all a most glaring falsehood.

On the contrary, Christ would say in this passage: You, my disciples, have now heard of the office and functions of the Holy Ghost. Concerning this I have yet much to say unto you, but you are unable to comprehend it now; you must learn it by experience. For the Holy Spirit will also guide you into all truth and protect you from false and damnable doctrine. Without such guidance of the Holy Spirit it easily happens that we depart from the truth, that we neglect the Word and suddenly fall into grievous error.

Arius picked out one or two passages and made them the basis of his heresy, while he, on the other hand, disregarded the many plain and convincing testimonies concerning Christ. The Anabaptists take as proof for their doctrine the command of Christ: "Go, teach and baptize all nations." They say that if instruction should precede baptism, as this passage implies, then of course infant baptism is wrong, for it does not admit of instruction preceding baptism. It is however evident that the command to teach prior to baptism has reference only to adults. A similar perversion of the text occurred in regard to the Lord's Supper. The plain words of Christ were set aside, while certain confused and dubious expressions of the fathers were highly esteemed as decisive. Surely, error is speedily upon us if the Holy Ghost does not guide us into all truth.

Christ also says: "The Comforter will show you things to come." This prophesying is another function of the Holy Spirit, and we have many examples of its application in the Acts of the Apostles. But the Holy Ghost "shall also glorify me,"

continues Christ. With this declaration the Lord assures the disciples, and all believers, that their hearts shall be filled with a knowledge of God, whereby they will be strengthened to undergo all sufferings and joyfully to brave every danger for His sake. Such is the work of the Holy Ghost, which indeed cannot be fully understood if experience in faith is wanting. Christ therefore tells the disciples that for the present it suffices them to be encouraged in tribulation and to rejoice at His going to the Father; for then would come the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to reprove the world of sin, to bring true righteousness and an assurance of eternal life.

These lessons we learn from the Gospel for this Sunday. May God, our Father, through Christ Jesus, send the Holy Spirit into our hearts, there to begin and to complete the work of salvation! Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(ROGATE.)

JOHN 16, 23-30. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto Him, Lo, now speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask Thee: by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God.

In the Gospel to-day we have, as you, my beloved, have just heard, an exhortation to prayer. To pray is a part of Christian worship, secondary only to the preaching of the Word. This exhortation to prayer was made by the Lord at the supper of the same evening on which He told His disciples, while sitting with them at the table, as we saw in the sermon of two weeks ago, that He would depart from them, that they would be sad, but that in a little while He would see them again and that then their sorrow would be turned into joy. With this promise the Lord combines the admonition to prayer, as it is contained in our text; and indeed the connection of the two is very obvious; for the Christian has no other resort or comfort in sorrow and tribulation than to pray earnestly and constantly to his heavenly Father for help.

The Lord would teach us in the words of our Gospel, as He did His disciples then, never to forget prayer in the hour of distress. To encourage them to this He adds the comforting declaration: "And I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." It is true, Christ sitteth at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us, as the apostle Paul says. Therefore we know that His intercession for us, both on the occasion of the last supper and afterwards upon the cross, has been effective and will continue to be so until the end of time. But you need not my intercession in your behalf, says Christ, for you yourselves have access to the Father with your prayers, and ought not to doubt that they are heard, for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me. Yet from this it does not follow that the intercession of Christ is not of importance and full of comfort unto us, but simply this is meant, that we should have assurance respecting our own prayers because we love Christ. It is God's will, and we ought ever to know and remember it, that they who love Christ and trust in Him are beloved of the Father and will be heard by Him. It is therefore evident that the godless Papists lie when they direct us to trust in the intercession of the saints.

This exhortation and invitation to prayer by the Lord Himself is consolatory beyond measure. Our Lord and Saviour Christ made it possible for us, by His death and departure from this world to the Father, to have free access unto God, whether we be in church or at home, in the cellar or in the

kitchen, in the field or in the workshop ; yea, if we are Christians and love Christ, we can under all circumstances of life come with our prayer unto our heavenly Father and pour out our hearts before Him.

All that is necessary for such prayer is for the heart to exclaim : Father in heaven, I know Thou lovest me because I love Thy dear Son, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, wherefore I come with my requests to Thee in confidence and assurance, not indeed because I am good or righteous, but because I know that for the sake of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Thou wilt accept of me and give me all that I need. In His name I now appear before Thee and pray, fully convinced that Thou wilt not consider my unworthiness, but wilt graciously hear my prayer.

It would be a serious mistake for the Christian to refrain from prayer until he could deem himself worthy and fit for it. The devil frequently troubled me with thoughts such as these : I am not now ready to pray ; I ought first to attend to this or that and afterwards perform my prayer undisturbed. If we indulge such thoughts which hinder and prevent prayer, we will always find something new in the way, and in the end will be entirely prayerless. The devil with his cunning tricks constantly endeavors to keep us away from prayer.

We must therefore be prepared to meet his opposition in this regard ; and when troubles come we should know that now is the proper time for prayer. If we are not worthy to pray, God will make us so. He loves us for Christ's sake, and not on account of our own worthiness or righteousness, for we have none. This we fully believe.

Christ, in the words of our text, would urge us on to prayer, that we might not be like those prayerless, wicked people who, as they declare, eat and drink with much relish, though they have not prayed for a week. If we are Christians, or desire to be such, we must shun such brutish conduct. Let us, at least, pray in the morning when we arise from sleep, at the table, and again in the evening when we go to bed, saying: "Our Father who art in heaven," &c.

It is our duty as Christians to pray without ceasing, if not aloud, which is sometimes impossible, at least in our hearts. It should at all times be the earnest desire of all believing hearts that God's name be hallowed, that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth, also that He may grant peace to the country, favorable weather, health, and the like. Every true Christian wishes for such blessings every day of his life, even if he does not always give expression to his desires. Such prayer is true, earnest and spiritual; we stand constantly in need of it on account of the great dangers which ever surround the Christian on all sides, so that we are never safe from the devil, from our flesh and blood, from sin and shame.

But oral prayer must not be neglected; it ought to accompany these silent utterances of the heart. Christ teaches us here of what kind such prayer should be; He say: "Ye shall ask the Father in my name," and again: "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." Whosoever believeth in Christ is a real priest with all priestly honors and dignity, so that he can assuredly come with his

prayer unto God to ask Him for help in reference to his own want or that of his fellow-men, saying unto Him: Lord I stand in need of this and my brother of that, grant us our prayer and give us what we need, for the sake of Christ, Thy well-beloved Son.

The times in which we now live are full of distress and well calculated, on account of the daily sorrow which they bring, to teach us the importance of prayer; if we but heeded the lesson and were more instant in prayer, it would be well for us. For indeed the devil, that liar and murderer, is very busy; he endeavors to crush out the Word of God with his falsehoods, and strives to arouse seditions throughout the land, with murder and rapine. The Pope and the Turk, and other tyrants, are all fiercely opposed to the Word, so that we all have enough public calamity to urge us on to prayer, even if our own private sorrow would not do it. Yea, there are causes enough, within us and around us, to convince us of the great necessity of prayer. If we are perplexed amid so great a variety of complaints, sorrows and wants which demand our prayer, let us make good use of the Lord's Prayer with its seven petitions, which include everything for which we ought to pray.

SHORT EXPOSITION OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

In the first petition, "Hallowed be Thy name," we pray for all faithful preachers, but against all heretics and unbelievers, also against the Jews, the heathens, the Turk and the Pope; for these blaspheme and abuse the name of God. We pray God to resist these His enemies, and to grant us pious

preachers, who will proclaim His Word in its purity to the overthrow of all heresy.

In the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," we pray that the kingdom of death and the devil may fall. This is a very comprehensive petition; it deals with the entire domain of Satan, and requests God to make an end to it and to establish in us and others His own kingdom, by means of His Word and the Holy Ghost.

In the third petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," we pray that every will opposed to the good and gracious will of God may be prevented in its execution. The devil and the wicked are wroth against this petition; it prevents much calamity, which they would cause every day of our life, if it were not for this prayer.

In the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," we pray for those in authority, for our parents, for our family, for the necessary food and the fruits of the field, for peace and all things pertaining to the support of our life, also that God would bless each one in his vocation and protect him mercifully from all harm.

In the fifth petition, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," we pray that God would be merciful to and avert from us His well-merited wrath, that He would not punish us on account of our sins, but bestow on us His grace that we may become better from day to day, do His will, and live peaceably with our fellow-men, ready to forgive one another our trespasses.

In the sixth petition, "Lead us not into temptation," we pray that God would cheer with His consolation all afflicted hearts and rescue them from

their sorrows through His Word and the Holy Spirit, thus thwarting the intention and power of the devil.

In the seventh petition, "Deliver us from evil," we pray for a peaceful departure from this world of misery, and for a happy entrance through the mercy of God into heaven above.

Thus we see how beautifully everything that we possibly need is included in the Lord's Prayer. Its petitions contain nothing of which we do not have need every day of our life. Wants we have plenty; first those of a public nature, then those which are private and pertain to each one's household and vocation. Therefore we have reason enough to pray, and if we do not, our negligence and unbelief is to blame. We have the distinct command to pray, as well as the promise that our prayer shall be heard. Christ even gives us of His own accord a proper form of expressing our wishes before God. This form is the Lord's Prayer, of which we have just spoken.

We must confess that we are poor sinners, unworthy to appear before God and to converse with Him, and that we have no claim whatever upon His kindness; this is most certainly true. But in order that this conviction might not discourage us or prevent us from praying, Christ says here explicitly that we should "pray in His name," and adds: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you." Here we are taught that the whole service of prayer and supplication must rest upon Christ; therefore every prayer not made in the name of Jesus is no true prayer, nor a service before God. The prayer of the monk, that

God would be merciful unto him on account of the merits, fastings and devotions of Saint Francis or of Saint Dominic, or of any other saint, is no prayer at all, but only fruitless babbling; for it is not offered up in the name of Christ, but in that of poor, miserable mortals.

Similar is the prayer of the heathens, of the Turks, of the Jews, yea of all the Papists. They refuse to pray in the name of Christ alone and add that of the virgin Mary, of the apostles and other saints. God does not accept such idolatrous prayer; it is not efficacious. Even if they obtain what they request in such prayers, it is no blessing unto them, and it would be much better for them if their wishes had not been realized.

Christians do not pray in their own name; they know what appellation belongs to them according to the Scriptures, namely, children of wrath and liars; therefore they are ashamed to make use of their own name when they pray unto God. But because they know that God is merciful in Christ, and because they have the command to pray in Jesus' name, therefore they are bold to come to God and to make known their requests, although they know themselves to be nought but poor sinners. They venture to say: Our heavenly Father, we, Thy children, need now this, now that; be merciful and remember not against us our iniquities, but look upon Christ Thy Son, our Saviour; in His name we now approach Thee; therefore hear our prayer. When our supplication is thus made entirely in the name of Christ, it is acceptable and will be heard; it is yea and amen in Christ. This knowledge ought to make us ready and quick to

prayer, for we are told that what we pray in the name of Jesus shall penetrate the heavens, even to the throne of God, who will grant our requests.

To this promise Christ adds the following words: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name." That is to say: Thus far the disciples depended upon Him as people sometimes depend on their priests, whom they expect to pray for them, thinking that they themselves need not do it. But this shall hereafter be changed; Christ says: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." This injunction we ought diligently to consider, that we may act in accordance with it. Sorrow, tribulation and depression will come; if we would overcome these we must pray as Christ commands, and believe that what we ask in His name shall be granted to us, if consistent with the glory of God and serviceable to our souls' salvation.

One thing we lack, as St. Paul remarks: "We know not what to ask for, nor how to ask." Hence it happens that people often pray to God for relief from this or that tribulation, without obtaining the relief implored; for God knows better than we do what is proper and good for us. St. Paul prayed to God to take from him his tribulation, but is answered, 2 Cor. 12: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Thus it happens to us. We sometimes desire to be exempt from this or that suffering; but God sees what is beneficial for us, and does not remove the burden from our shoulders, else we would become overbearing, proud and careless. Ere we therefore pray for our daily bread we should say: Lord, Thy will be done. Christ Himself at the

mount of Olives prays thus: "Father, not my will, but Thine, be done." We should always pray in a similar spirit of resignation to God's will, nothing doubting that He will give us whatever tends to His glory and our eternal welfare.

One other fault we have in this regard. Beyond all doubt God will hear us and grant a fulfillment of our petitions, if offered up in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ; but the manner and the time of His intervention and help is not designated. If now it happens that our plans do not succeed, our reason, our flesh and blood, cause despondency within our hearts, and we are ready to despair. So also, when our hopes are not fulfilled in just so many hours or days, in which, according to our calculation, we ought to have relief, we think that our prayer has been in vain. This twofold temptation is dangerous and very apt to weaken our faith. We must therefore cling firmly to God's Word, and await His help, which is promised us in the name of Christ, and which will surely come to pass, though perhaps later than we thought and in a different way. God alone knows the proper time and occasion; He is called *Adjutor in opportunitate*," a Helper in good time. This time, however, we must not attempt to calculate for Him according to our own wishes and feelings, but must leave its determination to His wisdom and love. We are entirely too impatient, and hence, when suffering comes, it will always seem to us that God delays too long with His assistance. Such thoughts are the same as if we would say: We know better than God when the time for help has come. Let us avoid such faithless self-conceit; let us trust im-

PLICITLY the promise that God, for the sake of Christ Jesus, His Son, will be gracious unto us and deliver us from evil at the proper time.

Such is Christian prayer, of which we stand in constant need, as shown above. In it we have true consolation and good cheer, for Christ says: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." Where prayer is wanting, there no true happiness exists, but always misery, fear and sorrow.

We have had frequent occasion, during the past years, to experience the efficacy of prayer. Without it we could not resist the enmity of the Pope and other adversaries; they would long since have wiped us out of existence. But now, because prayer prevails, he and all the tyrants who rage against the Church are continually repulsed. Let us, therefore, whose office it is to preach the Word, be unwearied in preaching, and let all Christians continue instant in prayer; then will the Church of Christ be well defended by the Word and prayer, against every enemy.

He that loves the Church of Christ and desires her prosperity, should never forget that he must do his share towards preserving her. This is done by prayer, by the earnest supplication to God that His name may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come, and that His will may be done on earth. We should also pray fervently for the overthrow of the power of the devil, that he may be put to shame, and that his nefarious plans may be frustrated. If we do this we shall, one and all, stand fully equipped and ready for the defence of the Church against the devil and the world; we shall be as the warrior who has his weapons in readiness and takes his

position in the front ranks, prepared for every onset. In this regard, every Christian is a warrior who battles constantly against the devil: we as preachers with our preaching, ye as hearers, together with us, with your earnest prayer. These two weapons: preaching and prayer, cut the devil to the very quick, and by no other means but these can he be repulsed and vanquished. Besides all this, we know that it is the will of the Father in heaven that we should freely use these weapons.

I have not the slightest doubt that many wicked plans of our adversaries and the enemies of the Word of God, have been frustrated by our prayer; and if now anything which is right is to be accomplished, or if any evil is to be prevented, prayer must do it. Let us then never undervalue the power of prayer, nor suppose ourselves unqualified, or too unworthy, to make use of it, else no one would dare to pray. Every Christian should be ready to exclaim: Since God delights in our prayer, and since we, the Church, the State and all, so greatly need it and are benefited thereby, we will pray with the Church and for her as much and as earnestly as we can, for we are convinced that it will not be in vain.

It would be wrong and dangerous to think that others may pray, but our prayer is of no account. Let us shun such thoughts, and rather say: Thanks be to God, we love Christ and His Word, and would sooner give up all things else than to deny our Lord; therefore it follows that the Father loves us and will hear our prayer, as Christ declares in our text. Nothing shall now hinder us from praying. It will indeed be well for us if we cheerfully

pray in the name of Christ and have full faith in His promise: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

When Christ further says: "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs," He does not wish to say that these instructions had been given in dubious and difficult words; for His expressions are definite and clear; but He portrays in these words the condition of the understanding of His disciples. They had as yet no experience in these things, nor did they know what kingdom Christ was establishing; all this was dark before their eyes, and when He spoke of it to them they understood not His words.

But the hour was nigh when this would be changed. He says: "The time cometh, when I shall speak to you no more in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father." When the Holy Spirit comes and fills the hearts with faith and confidence in the mercy and grace of God through Christ, then will follow the desire to engage in prayer, which will be a pleasure. Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to pray.

Zechariah therefore calls this Spirit "the Spirit of grace and of supplication." Both belong together. God must be recognized through faith as a merciful Father, because He gave for us His Son; but this faith is a gift of God, bestowed upon us through the Holy Ghost by means of the Gospel. Where this "Spirit of grace" dwells, there is also the "Spirit of supplication," so that we will implore God for help in suffering and tribulation, firmly believing that He will hear us for the sake of Jesus

Christ, His dear Son, and that He will be with us and bless us now and evermore.

Referring to this operation of the Holy Spirit, Christ says: "At that day ye shall ask in my name," and your prayer will surely be heard. For how could the Father, whom I have revealed unto you through the Holy Spirit, and whom you know, refuse your requests? He loves you because you love me and believe that I came out from God. True prayer must spring from such faith and confidence, else it is no prayer, even if it be couched in the most beautiful words.

May God, our Father, grant us His Holy Spirit through Christ Jesus, that we may pray to Him in every time of need, and thus worship Him in true faith, so that we may be freed from all our misery in time and in eternity. Amen.

ASCENSION DAY:

ACTS 1, 1-11. The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.

We commemorate this day the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning which we confess in our Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." The celebration of this day was therefore instituted not only that we, who daily peruse the Scriptures, might be reminded of the ascension of our Lord, but also that our children, who are constantly

growing up around us, and that the common people might be taught the ascension of Christ into heaven, so that by the keeping of this festival they might learn, together with us, how it happened and what blessings flow from it.

St. Luke gives a full and vivid description of the events of this day, so that we become intimately acquainted with the time, place and persons connected with the occurrence, and can clearly understand how it all happened. We are told how the Lord, when He had tarried with His disciples forty days, mostly in Galilee, after the time of His resurrection, during which days He ate with them and taught them of His kingdom, now assembled them on mount Olivet near Jerusalem, and gave them the command, as St. Luke narrates, not to depart from the city, but there to await the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, after which they should go into all the world to preach the Gospel. When He had finished these sayings, "He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." He thus ascended on high, with His body of flesh and bone, just as He had stood before His disciples. While they stand full of amazement at this occurrence, at this unheard of flight of a human body into the air, even as a bird would soar aloft, two angels come to them and tell them to return to their homes, that now the ascension was completed, that their Lord and Master would not return to the earth again until He came in a cloud, even as He had now ascended in one, to judge the quick and the dead. These are the outlines of the incidents as recorded in the first chapter of the Acts, and as you, my beloved, just heard from the words of our text.

In this event we ought to notice, first of all, the miraculous manner in which Christ ascended on high, how He went aloft into the air as a bird flies upwards, and then vanished out of the sight of His disciples. Surely, it is an uncommon, yea an impossible thing for men to fly upwards into the air. The human body is so constituted by nature that it tends downwards, like a stone or any other heavy material. Now Christ had after His resurrection also a real body of flesh and bone, which could be touched, as He Himself says Luke 24; yet it was a body which could, according to its constitution, move upwards or downwards at will and with equal ease.

From this fact we can learn what kind of body we are to receive after death. Now our bodies are heavy, clumsy and sluggish, but after the resurrection we shall obtain new bodies, which shall also be constituted of flesh and bone as to all their parts, but which at the same time shall not be heavy nor unwieldy, but as easily transferable from place to place as are now our thoughts. We see how this was with Christ after His resurrection; neither the rock over His grave, nor the closed doors, could prevent His passage; He sweeps through with lightning speed, and no one knows how it happens. He appears wherever He desires to do so, and is invisible at His pleasure. Now He is here, presently He is in some other place; He walks in the air as well as upon the ground. Such excellence is also in store for our bodies after the resurrection; albeit they shall be immortal, no more in need of food or drink, and never disturbed by disease.

Let us now consider the reason of this ascension of Christ, what He wished to achieve by it, and how its benefits can be enjoyed by us during our life on earth. The ascension of Christ, His going upwards, indicates first of all, and beyond all doubt, that He will have nothing to do with this world and its kingdoms; else He would have remained here, wielding the power of earthly kings and potentates. But He leaves all this below, and ascends into heaven, where we see Him not. By this He teaches us what His kingdom is and how we should regard it; that it is not of this world, as the disciples at first imagined that it would yield them wealth and power and honor, but a spiritual, eternal kingdom, in which He distributes spiritual blessings to all who are His subjects.

Let no one become a Christian with a view of thus obtaining earthly treasures and honors. The Office of the Ministry, Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not instituted for any such purpose; nor did Christ come upon earth, or ascend again into heaven, that He might establish such a transient, temporal, worldly kingdom. He had a higher, nobler aim, which was to bless us with heavenly gifts, with the forgiveness of sins, with righteousness and everlasting life. Such are the blessings in store for us through Christ, who would not remain on earth, but ascended on high to establish a spiritual, invisible, eternal kingdom.

This was prophesied long before by the Holy Ghost in the 68. Psalm, to which St. Paul refers when he, Eph. 4, speaks of the ascension and spiritual dominion of Christ. These are the words of

the Psalmist: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." This is a brief but very comprehensive passage, which we ought to consider attentively and remember with care. St. Paul does this so beautifully and appropriately when he thus dwells upon the former portion of the passage: "Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things."

How are these words of St. Paul to be understood? Simply thus: Because we derive such glorious benefits from the ascension of our Lord, as we shall hear presently, we ought also to know the source of such grace and blessings. Neither our good works nor saintly life have merited them; on the contrary, Christ alone, by His coming from heaven, by laying aside His heavenly glory when He became man in our behalf, and finally by His death upon the cross achieved for us the enjoyment of these gifts of grace. To such benefits St. Paul refers in the words just quoted, in which he speaks of the going down of Christ into the lower parts of the earth. Such expressions are in full harmony with each other; for he who is already on high needs not ascend on high. The declaration of the Holy Ghost concerning Christ: "He ascended far above all heavens" indicates therefore that He first descended to earth and humbled Himself for us. Hence these words of St. Paul correspond well with those of the Lord Himself, which we considered a

few Sundays ago: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you," John 16; and again John 14: "I go to prepare a place for you."

The expression, "Thou hast ascended on high," leads us also to make a distinction between the ascension of Christ and that of others of whom it is said that they ascended. Enoch was taken on high by God, and Elijah went into heaven on a fiery chariot. Not thus did Christ ascend; He went on high of His own accord, by means of the power inhering in His person, just as He also arose from the dead by His own power, without the assistance of any other.

Here then we have a marked difference. We cannot raise ourselves from the dead on the last day, but Christ must do it, John 6; He however arose in His own strength, as He says John 10: "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." And St. Peter, referring to this power of Christ, in his first sermon, Acts 2, says: "It was not possible that He should be holden of death." The same distinction we observe to exist between His ascension and ours. We ascend because Christ draws us after Him; He however goes on high of His own will and power, as He declares, John 3: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven." The Holy Ghost pointed out this peculiarity long ago, and

teaches us thereby to accept Christ as the true, almighty and everlasting God.

When the Psalmist says: "Thou hast ascended on high," he expresses but the same truth which Christ Himself declares before Pilate, as we have seen above, namely: "My kingdom is not of this world." We ought therefore as Christians to raise our hearts and thoughts on high, and seek first of all with diligence and great anxiety this spiritual kingdom; yea, although the field of our labor is on earth, where we have our vocation, our family, our cares for the support of our temporal existence and the government of the State, and the like, yet we ought ever to fulfill first this duty, to seek the kingdom of heaven. Do we do it? The greater portion of mankind is so absorbed, with soul and body, in the transactions of this life, that but little attention, or none at all, is given to the fact that Christ ascended on high. The Holy Ghost therefore earnestly desires to dispel this groveling spirit, and to teach us the truth that Christ did not remain on earth, but that He ascended on high, and that consequently we, even while we dwell in the body here below, should ascend to Him in our thoughts and mind, nor permit the cares of this world to burden our hearts.

Thus ought the Christians to distribute their powers. The body and the old Adam, as we have stated, may indeed be busied with the temporal work of every day life, but the heart should be engaged in seeking after the treasures of heaven, as St. Paul exhorts, Col. 3: "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right

hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

What does Christ do on high? Why did He ascend, and why did He not remain below? Is He idle now, or does He do anything? The 68. Psalm, already quoted, answers these queries in the sentence: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive." These words are exceedingly pleasant and cheering, and it would seem as if Christ referred to this Psalm when He says, Luke 11: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."

We poor mortals are, on account of sin, under the dominion of Satan and death; these two hold us in chains with such power that we are totally unable to free ourselves from such tyranny. The devil unceasingly aims at us his fiery darts and seeks to devour us. The law points out to us our sins, and accuses and terrifies our conscience on account of them to such a degree that it must exclaim in bitter anguish: Alas, alas, I have sinned against God and my neighbor, and therefore am guilty of death. Against these our irrepressible enemies we have no defence, neither of ourselves nor of others, though these be angels or saints. Christ alone is the stronger One; He comes and meekly puts Himself under the law for us and is judged by it as the greatest of sinners. He dies upon the cross between two malefactors, charged as a conspirator against the emperor and as a blasphemer of God. He thus, as a patient, innocent

lamb, bears the sin of the whole world, and pays with His own life the crushing debt. Nor does He in His suffering manifest His power and majesty; He hangs upon the cross for the very purpose of enduring death.

When the law, on account of its unjust sentence, had lost all its claim on Christ and its authority over Him; when sin and death, which had thus far ruled the world, were subdued and routed by His death; when the crucified Saviour had been laid in the grave and no one had the hope, the assurance and consolation that He would arise from it, He bursts forth from the embrace of death in full glory and majesty, as we saw on Easter Sunday, and leads "captivity captive," as the Holy Ghost here declares. Yea, He breaks the power of the devil, of the law, of sin and of death; these now lose their sway, so that the devil can no longer harm the Christians, nor the law accuse them, nor sin terrify them, nor death overwhelm them. In truth, a great and wonderful change! Formerly the devil influenced and led us as he pleased; we were caught in his meshes, and thought, and talked, and acted as he instigated. Hence the law threatened us and held up before us our crimes; sin ruled with strength and committed its votaries into the merciless, all-devouring jaws of death.

This painful, cruel captivity, from which none could escape, shall forever be led captive. This is the meaning of the 68. Psalm when we there read: "Christ has ascended on high, and has led captivity captive." He crushed the head of the devil, the god and prince of this world, and took from him his power and cast him into prison, even into the

gloomy fetters of hell, so that henceforth neither he nor his angels can injure those who believe in Christ. And though the devil rages with horrible madness and shows his teeth in blind fury, ready to bite like a rabid dog in chains, yet he can do no harm, but can only terrify us a little; for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ holds him bound, a prisoner, a culprit, judged, sentenced and damned. Therefore the devil has no authority over us, nor can he injure us, but will rather by his continual lying in wait make us more cautious to cling steadily to Christ, the Conqueror, who crushed the head of the serpent; otherwise, if the devil did not rave and threaten so furiously, we might become secure and careless. But the enemy is at hand; he neither rests nor permits us to be at peace; this makes us watchful, active and bold.

As the devil, even though vanquished and made prisoner by our great Captain, Christ, does not cease to annoy and trouble the Christians, so the law does not cease to reveal to them sin in its most hideous character. Thus it works wrath, that is, it accuses, terrifies and condemns us as transgressors of its precepts. It not only demands of us to lead an outwardly upright and becoming life, to do good works commanded in its tables, but it also exacts of us an earnest, ready and efficient obedience, that we should love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves.

If we are honest and in our right mind we must surely confess that we have not even earnestly thought of the law in this light, much less that we have thus kept its precepts, but that we have rather frequently broken them and done those things

which it distinctly forbids. Then comes the judgment of the law: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." If the law be understood spiritually and not carnally,—for he who regards it carnally becomes a hypocrite, a proud, sanctimonious pretender, who has many and grievous sins which he does not at all consider,—the heart which feels its terrible accusations is apt to conclude: Alas, I have not sinned against the emperor, or a king, or some other potentate of this world, but against the Word and command of God, the Ruler of heaven and earth; I have maliciously and knowingly neglected His mandates and despised His will, for which iniquity He will most certainly punish me, even for ever and ever, in the abyss of hell.

In this manner the law domineers over all mankind with terror, curses and condemnation, which is indeed an excruciating, intolerable captivity, which no one can avoid. Devout and God-fearing souls experience this very often, as many of the Psalms clearly show. The hypocrites, together with the whole crowd of bad, lawless and wicked men, shall also feel this captivity, if not in this life, during the time of grace, at least in their last hour, to their eternal shame and condemnation.

Where then can we find help in this sore distress? Hear once more what the Holy Spirit says through the prophet in the 68. Psalm: "He, Christ, has ascended on high and has led captivity captive;" that is: He wrenched from the law, which, whether we feel it now, or not till death, was our greatest enemy, all its authority and power over us. The

law exhausted itself when it sinned so wretchedly against Christ, its own Master, when it condemned Him as the greatest blasphemer and rebel to die upon the cross, and declared Him accursed; for thus we read the sentence of the law in Deut. 21 : "For he that is hanged is accursed of God;" and the Jews cried out before Pilate : "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." But now and for ever the law lies prostrate under the feet of Christ; it is bound, condemned and executed, yea, it has lost every vestige of power over those who believe in Him; its curse is removed from these, and they also, through their faith, have it under their feet. All the law can now do is to accuse and to threaten; more it cannot do, for it has lost its sway over us, and its claim upon us is annulled; we have in Christ a Redeemer; through faith in Him we fear not the law, nor shall it now lead us into despair, for it can no longer condemn.

St. Paul speaks of this happy change in precious words, Col. 2 : "He blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." And Isaiah says, 9. chapter : "He has broken the yoke of His burden, and the staff of His shoulder, the rod of His oppressor, as in the day of Midian." And, 1 Cor. 15, the Apostle Paul exclaims : "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Sin is busy still; it allures and tempts us to array us against God and to worry our conscience. Alas, often we are weak and suffer ourselves to be deceived and belied by sin, as it happened to David, the good and great man, who fell into two abominable sins. It is true, he did not continue therein, nor did he suffer death as punishment; for he believed in Christ, the coming Saviour of the world, and earnestly repented of his sins, so that they were forgiven him. Thus did sin not only lose its power over David, but it even became the occasion of making him more earnest in faith and prayer. If sin with its distressing consequences had not overwhelmed him, he would never have composed that beautiful Psalm of earnest supplication for pardon, the *Miserere*. (Psalm 51.)

Death also is still active; he delights in showing us his fangs and in threatening to devour us; and it is but natural for us to be frightened at his approach. But we ask; How is it that death does not accomplish what he desires, to slay the Christians? The answer is: Death is after all vanquished; his power is not unlimited; he is a captive, restrained by the hand of his Conqueror, Christ. With all his raving and most dreadful threatenings against the Christians, he accomplishes but this, that they will cling so much the more firmly to the Word of God, learning and keeping its precepts with greater diligence, to their great comfort and joy. Otherwise, if death did not threaten, they would not cherish the Word of God so dearly and faithfully.

These terrors and dangers, indeed, afflict the Christians to a good purpose; but they are by no

means harmless. On the contrary, in their nature they are very baneful, as is manifest in their effects upon the world. But here we see and experience the importance and benefits of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an assurance unto us that these fearful enemies have all been subdued and that they can no more perpetrate upon Christians their wicked designs. Yea, if these were not conquered foes we would be accused and cursed by the law, condemned by sin, slain by death, and thrust into the lowest region of hell by the devil. Now however we fear them not, though they are bitter against us. The ascension of Christ is therefore a most glorious and blissful occurrence; it assures us of the defeat and subjugation of the mighty enemies, the law, sin, death and the devil. Christ has led them captive and redeemed us from their grasp; and He ascended on high, and sits at the right hand of God, for the very purpose of defending His Christians against the assaults of these foes.

But this is not all. The Psalm continues: "Thou hast received gifts for men," that is, gifts for the benefit of men. What gifts are these? We read of them, Joel 2: "After those days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh," and St. John 16: "But if I depart, I will send the Comforter unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." Similar are the words of St. Peter, Acts 2: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He has shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

The office of the Holy Ghost is twofold. He

brings us, in the first place, through the Gospel to a knowledge of Christ, so that we believe the forgiveness of sins in His name. In the second place, He causes us to lead a holier life, to resist and subdue sin, and to practice an implicit obedience toward God. Thus will our body and soul, our heart and all that we are, become sanctified and righteous. Though on earth we will never be entirely free from sin, on account of our depraved human nature, yet if we have faith in Christ we shall not be condemned for the infirmity which still cleaves to us, nor will our sin be counted against us. Thus does the Holy Ghost exert His influence in us.

And He does still more. He employs us also to bring others to this same grace and knowledge by means of the Word and the office of preaching. In this sense does the Apostle St. Paul in Eph. 4. quote this 68. Psalm, where he says that as a result of the ascension of Christ "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Nor are we ignorant of the fact that the devil is hostile to the Word, especially in our time, when he urges on the infidels and the Pope, with their numerous hosts, to crush the Word and to root out the Christians. But in spite of the raging fury of the unbelievers and the Pope, the Word continues upon its course of victory; they are unable to overthrow the power of the Word and Sacraments. Here we perceive again the effi-

cacy of the ascension of our Lord. He ascended on high to send down the Holy Spirit for the establishing and increase of His kingdom on earth.

Another gift is this: God governs and protects His Church at all times; He comforts her in tribulation; He rescues her from persecution; guides her into all truth over against falsehood, and gives her an earnest spirit of prayer, as we heard His words last Sunday: "On that day ye shall ask in my name," which cannot be done except by the assistance of the Holy Ghost. In short, all that we have and enjoy are free gifts of Christ, the fruit of His glorious ascension. He ascended on high to promote His kingdom, that through the Word and the Holy Ghost His Church might be established and preserved.

St. Luke in his Gospel points to this fact in these words: "While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven." This blessing was not a mere expression of good will, a parting wish, such as we employ when bidding each other farewell. He wished them success and joy in the holy office which He had intrusted unto them, of preaching the Gospel unto all creatures throughout the world. This preaching was not ordained in behalf of trees, stones, birds or fishes, out in behalf of mankind, as is clearly evident from what follows: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Stone and wood cannot believe, nor did Christ give a command to baptize them. As therefore faith and baptism pertain alone to men, so does also the preaching of the Gospel. When Christ uses the expression: "Preach the Gospel unto every creature," He means that no

calling or position in life shall be excluded from hearing the Gospel; that emperors and kings, be they ever so mighty, must hear, accept and believe this Gospel or else be damned. To such preaching Christ ordains His apostles; when He lifts up His hands He blesses them. He thus not only wishes them success, but helps them and grants them prosperity, and bestows His blessing in the administration of their office.

This benediction of our Lord Jesus Christ still continues, and is efficacious wherever the holy Gospel is preached in its purity, so that this preaching is not in vain. This blessing bestowed upon the disciples by the Lord, at the very time of His ascension on high, is full of consolation for us. He thereby invites us to keep in mind His going to the Father, and to rest assured under all tribulation that the blessing of His ascension is with us, and that He will employ its glorious effects for our benefit. If His purpose were otherwise, if He were angry with us and would not use us in His kingdom, He would certainly not have departed on high with these tokens of love towards us. The fact of His raising His hands in blessing over His disciples, thereby promising them all prosperity and success in their holy office, to which He had called them, is an assurance unto us that the Lord is our faithful, true Friend, whose blessing is ever upon us as long as the Gospel is preached.

These considerations teach us, my beloved, what a happy and comfortable day this festival of Christ's ascension is unto us, and what manifold blessings flow from it. Henceforth the Son of God, who assumed our flesh and blood and overcame the law,

sin, death and the devil, sits at the right hand of the Father and protects us against the many assaults of these our foes. They are indeed relentless enemies, constantly on the alert to injure us; and yet they are in captivity, led captive by our ascended Lord. Christ furthermore sends us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to protect us from error, to console us in sorrow, to teach us how to pray, and to confer upon us various gifts and graces. Christ "ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things," says St. Paul, and thus expresses the truth that we now have through our Lord all things that we need for time and for eternity. Let us therefore imitate the example of the apostles, as it is recorded by St. Luke, who "worshiped the Lord" and were filled "with great joy;" let us give hearty thanks unto our heavenly Father for His manifestation of mercy, and pray that He may keep us in true faith, so that in the end we may depart in peace from this world, following our ascended Lord into eternal life and happiness. O Christ, grant us this in mercy! Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION.

(EXAUDI.)

JOHN 15. 26-16, 4. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Our text to-day consists of two parts. The first speaks of the Holy Ghost; the second treats of the persecution awaiting those who preach the Gospel and confess it before the world.

You are aware that we believe the Holy Ghost to be true God, eternal and almighty. Christ designates Him in our text by an especial name when He calls Him "the Comforter." This appellation would indicate that the Christians must be ready to endure dangers and to suffer pain; for what need would there be of a Comforter if sorrow and suffering were not our lot? The suffering of the Christians, according to the text, shall consist not only in being put to death, which would not be the severest trial of their faith, but in this also, that those who slay them shall think they are doing God service, and will proclaim abroad that their victims suffered deservedly. It is indeed a most appalling death and punishment when every one

is ready to exclaim: Ah, it is right thus; this heretic has but received his dues! Thus we see that the Christians have no sympathy nor consolation from the world; they are persecuted and slain as heretics. Sometimes they are even weak enough to think: Perhaps we acted amiss and were imprudent in our confession. Thus they are looked upon as evil-doers by the world, and are scarcely easy in their own conscience.

Christ had in view just this distressing condition of the Christians when He speaks of the Holy Ghost as a "Comforter." By this name He tells us: I know how you will fare in the world, that you will often be without cheer and consolation; but I will not desert you then, nor permit you to perish in your misery; and when you are destitute of all comfort, when you are filled with anxiety and fear, then will I send you the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, to strengthen and to cheer you; listen therefore attentively to His words and remember them well.

There are two kinds of consolation. The one is of a worldly nature, false and deceptive; it directs man to trust in wealth, honor and power, in the friendship and favor of princes and rulers of this world. Christ teaches His disciples in our Gospel that they will not have this favor and friendship of the world, but that it will employ all its power, influence and wealth to oppose and crush them. He tells them that they ought not to be frightened nor downcast because they are in want of this kind of consolation, which is in every way miserable and unreliable; it lasts only a little while, perhaps till some fever, a pestilence, a headache, or some other

bodily ailment comes—then it amounts to nothing. But, says Christ, I will give you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who can indeed comfort you before the world and in your own hearts whenever you are distressed, timid, poor and forsaken. He is just what He is called, a Comforter; He brings no sorrow. Wherever sadness and grief dwells, there the Comforter has not His home. This Comforter is also called “the Spirit of truth,” because He does not comfort for a little while only, as the world does, but with an eternal consolation which deceives no man.

Our hearts are apt to contradict this and to say: We feel nothing of this consolation, but, on the contrary, we see how the world enjoys pleasure and happiness, while the Christians must suffer much. John the Baptist is beheaded, but Herod and his harlot are banqueting and full of glee. Our experience is similar. The world begrudges us every bite of bread and thinks it does a praiseworthy deed when it persecutes the Christians; but the Pope, his cardinals, the bishops, and the whole host of enemies to the Gospel, live at ease in gardens of roses, without tribulation. Where now is the promised comfort? Christ answers: It is present; you have it with you; only distinguish between the two kinds of consolation. It is true, the world has its peculiar comfort, or it would not be so careless and jovial; but it is a lying comfort, which does not proceed from the Spirit of truth. It may happen in a moment that the world’s consolation lies shattered and powerless.

On the other hand, this Comforter of the Christians is a “Spirit of truth,” pouring into our hearts

a consolation unceasing. Though John had not that consolation which Herod and his concubine had, though he was by them cast into prison and cruelly beheaded, yet he was not without consolation; the Holy Spirit cheered him thus: John, make thou no account of the terrors surrounding thee; despair not because thou art imprisoned and subject to the taunts of the world, for thou knowest that its pleasures are of short duration; thy sufferings, however, will also be brief and will be followed by everlasting joy, one moment of which is more precious than a thousand years on earth with all its so-called pleasures. This consolation fills the heart of John, so that he does not fear death, but praises God for his liberation from this miserable, sinful body and for the entrance into eternal life.

Whence has the Holy Spirit this consolation? "From the Father," as Christ here declares, "for He, the Spirit of truth, proceedeth from the Father." This is a most valuable passage, which proves the doctrine of the Trinity. For if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, it follows that this Spirit is eternal, since nothing can proceed from the Father which in its essence and nature is not like unto Him. Just as God the Son is eternal because He is born of the Father from eternity, and what is born of the Father must be like unto Him; so the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father, must likewise be eternal. And again: Because Christ, the Son of God, sends the Holy Spirit, as He here declares, this Spirit must proceed equally from the Son and the Father. This article of our Confession we will, however, pass by for the present, and will treat further of it at some other time.

What is the consolation which the Holy Spirit brings? "He shall testify of me," says the Lord; that is: The devil will surely terrify and the world will persecute and kill the Christians, but the Holy Spirit will be present with His testimony to arouse faith and to encourage the wavering heart, making it firm in Christ. The Comforter will indeed not bring us thousands of dollars in our distress, as perhaps the world would do, but He will cheer us with the Gospel and the word of promise, so that we can exclaim: Let them take all, family and home, our goods and our honor, yea, even our life, yet we will not despond, for we have a Helper above, Christ Jesus our Lord, who for us became man, and died and arose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven in our behalf, as we daily confess in our Creed. Why then should we fear? The Son of God, our Lord, who went into death for us, cannot be our enemy, but will defend and aid us under all circumstances. If He thus loves us, then surely have we no cause whatever to fear or to mistrust Him.

This consolation we find in the words of Christ: "He shall testify of me," for outside of this testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ there is no sure and abiding consolation. The words "OF ME" ought therefore to be written in large letters and well remembered. They teach us that the Holy Spirit, when He comes to console, preaches no other doctrine, not the law, nor anything else but Christ, since it is impossible to comfort the troubled hearts except by preaching Christ's death and resurrection. It is certain that the urging of the law, of good works and an unblemished life,

brings no consolation; it only makes men diffident and full of fear; for without Christ God appears terrible, full of wrath and ready to punish. The preaching of Christ alone conveys true consolation, which beyond all doubt makes glad the hearts and cheers them in all sorrow.

Hence it is of the first importance to lay hold of this consolation, to cling to it and to say confidently: I believe in Jesus Christ who died for me; and I know that the Holy Ghost, who is called a Witness and a Comforter, speaks and testifies throughout all Christendom of no other source of consolation for the sorrowful than of Christ; this shall comfort me and this alone. If there were any other better and more reliable consolation, the Holy Ghost would give it; but there is none; therefore He testifies only concerning Christ.

Why does the Lord in this connection make use of the word "testify?" Could He not just as well have selected some other expression? He does it to direct our attention especially to the word. It is true, the Holy Ghost works inwardly in the heart, but this working, ordinarily, takes place by means of the preached Word. Thus says St. Paul, Rom. 10: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" For this reason Christ calls the Holy Spirit a Witness, who bears His testimony through the mouth and word of the apostles and all preachers who proclaim the Gospel of Christ in its purity.

Let therefore no one who needs consolation suppose that the Holy Ghost will show him Christ personally, or speak to him audibly from heaven. He bears His testimony publicly through the

preaching of the Word which we hear with our ears. Through such preaching He moves the heart and testifies of Christ also inwardly. But this inward testimony is only the result of a preceding, public and outward preaching of Christ, which declares that He became man for us, and that He was crucified, and died, and arose again in our behalf.

We thus learn from our text this lesson, that if we desire to be Christians we must be content though we do not here on earth have much money, wealth, pleasure, and the like, but rather the enmity of the world, and, in addition, sin and death and an accusing conscience. When such affliction visits the Christians, their hearts are apt to despond and fear; they are then inclined to say: Why is it thus? What have we gained? Could we not have been Christians without undergoing such privations and tribulations? It is our own fault now that we are in such misery, &c. Besides, the awful examples of many well-known persons who, when they had fallen into great and shameful sins, perished in their misery, will be remembered and tend to increase the despondency. In such periods of gloom and unrest we need especially the Comforter, and we have the word of Christ for it, that He will most assuredly be present to teach us that such heavy, oppressive thoughts are not from Him, but from the spirit of evil. And this is evident enough that such thoughts terrify and lead to despair; the Holy Spirit, however, does not terrify; He consoles, encourages, and testifies that Christ has conquered the world and its ruler. Hence all thoughts which

cause sadness and depression are from the devil. The Holy Ghost in testifying of Christ, how He gave His life for our redemption and arose for our justification, dispels all gloom from the heart and fills it with consolation and joy. His testimony is therefore unto us a sure proof that Christ is our Friend, that He does not desire our destruction, but our eternal salvation. All this is contained in the expression: "He shall testify of me."

We ought to be especially mindful of this in our conflict with the sectarians and false preachers. Here we are told that the Holy Ghost as a Comforter shall testify of Christ and implant Him in our hearts. The evil spirit, on the other hand, terrifies the consciences by holding up to them sin and death. But then comes again the Holy Spirit with His testimony, which consoles and admonishes us not to look merely to sin, death and damnation, which is indeed an awful, terrific and overwhelming view, but to turn the eyes to that Man who is called Jesus Christ. Of Him we confess: He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell, and on the third day arose again from the dead. And why do we confess this of Him? Did not all this happen to Him that we might have consolation amid sin and death? Let us therefore lay aside our timidity and despondency, for which there is no good reason. If Christ were not with us, if He had not achieved for us redemption, then indeed would we have ground for fear. But now He is with us; He Himself declares: Lo, I am with you always even

unto the end of the world. For this He suffered death, and now sitteth on the right hand of His heavenly Father for our consolation.

Wherever this truth is preached, there the voice, testimony and teaching of the Holy Spirit is heard. All other preaching, whatever it may be, is the voice of the law, or perhaps of the very devil himself, who through hypocrites, heretics and self-righteous persons often testifies and preaches, but only to the sorrow, pain and despair of his hearers. May God in mercy protect us from the devil's testimony and preserve us to our end in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Amen. This is the first part of our Gospel for this day, which treats of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, and of His work of consolation among the Christians.

Let us now also consider the second part, which treats of affliction and persecution. First we should mark the words of Christ to His disciples: "They shall put you out of the synagogues." These words simply mean that those who excommunicate the Christians and "put them out" of the Church, as they say, will claim for themselves authority to do so, and will boast that they are the synagogue and the true Church, and suppose themselves entitled to much praise for thus zealously serving God. For this reason Christ adds the words: "Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

It therefore behooves us to learn what the true Church is, and to bear in mind that there are always two kinds of churches. The one has the name only, but is a false church; it claims to contain the people of God, but lies in this assertion. The

other has not the name, but is nevertheless the true Church. It is difficult to distinguish these two churches ; for we must admit that the false one also possesses the rightful office of the ministry. Therefore, although we hold and openly declare that the Pope and his followers are not the true Church, we must nevertheless admit that when they baptize, or ordain ministers, or perform the marriage ceremony, the office and Word of God are right and valid. Accordingly we do not re-baptize those baptized by them. Cyprian erroneously held that the baptism of heretics was no true baptism, and therefore he re-baptized those whom they had baptized. He contended that the heretics were without the pale of the Christian Church, and therefore had no right to the functions of her office. But in this he was mistaken.

We must distinguish between the office itself and the person executing it. The man may be guilty of sins and unconscientious dealings, which show that he is not in full communion with the Church of Christ ; yet this fact does not justify us in regarding the office which he happens to have in the Church as of no account. We must remember that the office is Christ's, and not that person's who performs its functions. If any one disregards the command of Christ, so that he preaches and administers the Sacraments otherwise than the Lord has ordained it, then of course we deny the validity of such administrations. But as long as the order of Christ's institution is observed in the administration of the office, its efficacy is not destroyed by the imperfections and sins of the person entrusted with it.

If we would, therefore, correctly distinguish and

judge these two churches, we must not confine our investigation to the office of preaching and administering the Sacraments; for the false church may also have and execute this office correctly and still be no Church. We all know how the false church with much external splendor parades the name of God and prides itself on this account. Let us not be deceived thereby. The second commandment tells us plainly how the name of God may be taken in vain; and in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer we ask that the name of God may be hallowed, which is an indication that His name is often desecrated. Be we therefore not affrighted when the false church proceeds to condemn and excommunicate us in the name of God and of the Church, since we know that the name of God is often abused and taken in vain. And when they thus would threaten and overawe us with the use of the name of God and the power of the Church, we will remember that the greatest unbelievers can make the same attempt, or there would have been no occasion for the caution not to take the name of God in vain. Our judgment in regard to the true Church must therefore be based principally upon the fact that she is there where God's name is honored and where her glorious privileges are not abused.

That this judgment is correct we learn from the declaration which the Lord makes in our text concerning the false church; for it is evident that the true Church will not have recourse to the sword or worldly authority. The false church, however, continually takes the sword in hand and persecutes the true Church, as Christ here predicts: "They shall put you out of the synagogues, and whosoever

killeth you," &c. From this we learn what the false church is, and still more plainly from the following verse: "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me." This is a most excellent description of the false church. It may have the office of the ministry and may boast of the name of God, but it is after all accursed, because it knows neither Christ nor the Father.

When do we "know Christ and the Father?" Not when we read mass, or put on a cowl, or fast, or give alms, nor when we perform any other similar work; but only then do we know Him, when we believe that He is the Lamb of God which bore the sin of the world, and that He in our behalf became man, was crucified, dead and buried, and that He arose again on the third day and ascended into heaven. This knowledge and belief gives consolation, and a sure confidence in God that He will be gracious unto us for the sake of His Son. Thus will we "know also the Father," when we are assured that He is merciful unto us and prepared to forgive our sins for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. Where there is this knowledge and belief, there is the true Church, and wherever it is wanting, there is the false church, even if the office of the keys and the name of God are there. If we consider these criterions well we can make no mistake in judging where the true Church is.

The division which in our day prevails in the Church perplexes many, so that they are in doubt to which part they should adhere. Their great mistake is that they do not apply the rule just now stated. We preach that man has no redemption

from sin and death except in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that whosoever has this faith shall be saved. But he who does not believe this cannot enter heaven, though he do ever so many good works. This doctrine is taught plainly and powerfully both in the Old and in the New Testament, as we shall show to you more fully on another occasion. But what is the consequence of this our preaching? The Pope and his multitude persecute us on account of this doctrine; they excommunicate us and call us heretics, and desire to kill us, because we hold this faith. They teach that man must work out his own salvation, or he cannot enter heaven. They hold that Christ merely made satisfaction for our original sin, but that we must with good works satisfy the wrath of God for every actual sin which we have committed after our baptism. How does such teaching correspond with a knowledge of Christ? Surely, if Christ made satisfaction for our sins, we need not do it. Good works ought indeed to be done by us, but not for the purpose of thereby atoning for our sins, or of purchasing an entrance into heaven.

By this rule we can easily judge which is the true Church. We are excommunicated because we know no other righteousness and grace but that which Christ gained for us by His death and resurrection. The Pope and his church, on the other hand, seek their salvation in their own works, merits and satisfaction, which surely indicates that they know neither Christ nor the Father. Since we then have this great treasure, to know Christ aright, while they are ignorant of Him, let us be undismayed and undisturbed if they who know not

Christ nor the Father anathematize us and call us the devil's church. We will rather concern ourselves with the knowledge of the Son and of the Father, because if we know God aright we are secure, and will not heed the senseless squealing of the Pope, who boasts so haughtily of his church, and hands us over to the devil.

We comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the day will come when a far different judgment will be passed upon us, when God Himself, with His unerring sentence, will declare us free from the false judgment and ban of men, and will own us as His Church before His holy angels. On earth it will ever be as Christ says in our text; there will be two churches, the one ever at war with the other. The false church has the sword in hand, and with it defends itself against all public rebuke and punishment; wherefore it is evident that the Pope and his crowd cannot be the true Church, for of her it is said in our Gospel that she will be persecuted and put under ban: "They shall put you out of the synagogues." Whom does Christ mean by the little word "you?" Does He not therewith designate His own beloved disciples and apostles? These shall be "put out" and killed. By whom? By those who call themselves the synagogue, the Church.

The same holds true in our day. Therefore we fear not their proscription and persecution, but patiently submit to it, knowing that true Christians and the true Church are thus proved and made manifest. We of course speak here only of those who are thus hated and persecuted because they know the Son and His Father. The Anabaptists

and other sects are also persecuted and suffer much ; but they do not know Christ and the Father ; for they deny the blessing which God bestowed upon them in their first baptism, and establish a new kind of monkish life, with the purpose of obtaining thereby a merciful God and an entrance into heaven. The true Church, however, knows Christ and the Father ; she consoles herself with the knowledge that only in Christ is God reconciled unto us ; and for this consolation and hope she is persecuted. But she suffers uncomplainingly ; it is nothing new to her, for Christ has prophesied this ; therefore she submits, and lets the Pope with his followers call her a heretical church and the devil's home. The true Church can look complacently on the fury of her tormentors ; she knows Christ and the Father, and is well assured that the Pope and his multitude, much as they vaunt themselves, have no knowledge of God, and therefore they persecute the believers. The true Church suffers willingly with Christ, looking in faith to that time when she will triumph with Him in glory everlasting. God grant us all this glorious triumph through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

FIRST SERMON FOR PENTECOST.

ACTS 2, 1-4. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The word Pentecost is Greek, and means in this connection the fiftieth day. Pentecost was with the Jews a great festival, occurring fifty days after Easter, and was kept in commemoration of the delivery unto them of the ten commandments, which took place at mount Sinai, fifty days after they had eaten the passover and left the land of Egypt. This event was a great blessing to the people; in it God Himself revealed unto them His will from heaven, that they might know what is pleasing to Him and what is displeasing. That this great and important event might be well remembered, God commanded Israel to keep holy the fiftieth day after Easter; for thus should the people learn to value more and more the blessing of God contained in the revelation of His will and to remember the promise which they made to keep His commandments, as we plainly read in the 19. and 20. chapters of Exodus.

The events which occurred in the Old Testament, and which were of great importance to the Jews, were only an example of what should happen in the new dispensation, in the time of grace, as St. Paul speaks of it, 1 Cor. 10. The blood of the lamb

with which they stained their doorposts in Egypt had no other virtue but to cause the destroying angel to pass by and to spare their first-born; the blood of our Easter Lamb, of Christ Jesus, has more power than this: it frees us from the bondage of that most dreadful Egypt, the slavery and tyranny of the devil, and redeems us from sin and eternal death. Therefore we have a far better Easter sacrifice than they had of old. So we have in the New Testament a far better Pentecost than that which the ancient Israelites celebrated.

They received the Ten Commandments at mount Sinai. These contain a necessary, good and precious revelation of God's will, for which thanks are due unto Him; yet such revelation assists us nothing against the power of the devil, of sin and of death. The law only makes us greater sinners, and prompts our conscience to accuse and to threaten us before God, since we fall far short of doing what is commanded.

As the circumstances amid which the law was given on mount Sinai were terrible, when thunder and lightning intermingled and the whole mountain smoked and quaked, so the law still terrifies guilty hearts and makes them sore afraid, so that they tremble and know not what to do for terror. To know what God demands of us and at the same time to be conscious of our transgressions, must necessarily arouse our fears and fill the soul with anxiety; for we all know what God threatens those who break His commandments, namely, eternal death and every misery. Hence this Pentecost of the Jews is an unpleasant, terrifying feast, destitute of all happiness. It appeared so horrible and awful

that the Jews implored Moses in these words: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

How different from this is our Pentecost! It has no terror, but is full of cheer and glory and happiness and joy. We have heard how the Evangelist narrates the event: When the day of Pentecost was fully come, while the Jews were busy with thanksgiving for the possession of the Ten Commandments, and considered the occurrence on mount Sinai, the apostles and other Christians were also assembled in a certain house. Then there came of a sudden a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. At the same time there appeared unto them cloven tongues like flames of fire, flickering heavenwards; and thus the Holy Ghost was publicly seen and heard. He was heard in the mighty rushing of the wind, and was seen in the flames of fire. Thus Christ had promised it, and John the Baptist had prophesied: "You shall be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost."

This occurrence has its peculiar reason and meaning. The cloven tongues indicate that the preaching of the Gospel shall not be in vain; that it will move the hearts and kindle a new light in them, as we shall explain further on. Soon after the rushing of the wind and the appearance of these flames of fire, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost," who enlightened their hearts and encompassed them to such a degree, that they immediately knew Christ aright, and understood all the Scriptures, and took such courage that they would not keep to themselves this knowledge, but preached it

publicly and boldly. Besides this there occurred the glorious miracle that they could speak in every language, though before they understood only their mother-tongue. For this was the prophesy, that the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel should be at Jerusalem, and that from there it should spread abroad right quickly and boldly in every tongue, as the prophets had foretold. The Holy Ghost taught the disciples these various tongues on Pentecost, as an assurance that the Gospel should pass on beyond the boundaries of Judea and be preached throughout the whole world. This then is our Pentecost, the one of the New Testament, on which we are not afraid of God, but learn to know Him aright. We are glad and rejoice. Our conscience shall not frighten us, for Christ is our Saviour; in Him we have courage in the presence of God; and for His sake we are ready to endure all suffering, as is seen in the example of the apostles.

Christ prophesied of such a Pentecost in His last sermon, as did also the prophets David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Zechariah, and others. Let us therefore commemorate this day by preaching of the Holy Ghost, of His office and work, and how we ought to regard it if we would have a happy Pentecost and receive the Holy Spirit.

Think not, my beloved, that the Holy Ghost was not active in the Church and among men before this day. He is God from eternity, and omnipotent. Christ says: "He proceedeth from the Father," therefore He must be of the same nature and essence with the Father. We have furthermore reliable testimonies of the workings of the Holy Spirit in

the hearts of men in all ages, showing that He enlightened and governed them according to the will of God. Christ says that the Holy Ghost spake through the prophets, and St. Peter makes the same statement. The Evangelists also tell us that the aged Simeon, and Anna, and Zacharias, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist, were filled with the Holy Ghost.

Hence we must think and believe of the Holy Ghost as we do of Christ the Son of God, who is from eternity and who, soon after the first promise given of Him in Paradise, began His work of opposing the devil and crushing his head. This deed, begun and carried on long before His coming into this world in the form of our humanity, Christ completed when, in the fullness of time, He became man incarnate, died upon the cross, and on the third day arose again from the dead. In a similar manner has the Holy Ghost been continually active in the world. He ever and anon brought men to believe in God by means of the divine Word; He enlightened, strengthened, comforted, and guided them into all truth.

This work, carried on secretly before, He now for the first time made public with power and might on this glorious day of Pentecost. Every one present on this occasion saw and felt the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, and had to confess it. For the few who ventured to contradict this manifestation of the Holy Ghost by saying that the apostles were full of new wine, were simply malicious liars; their reason must have convinced them that the knowledge of foreign languages is not acquired by getting drunk.

Why was this out-pouring of the Holy Ghost postponed until this day of Pentecost? For this reason, that we might know this great blessing to be ours alone through Christ Jesus. He gained for us these gifts, and alone through Him can we obtain them, as we saw from the 68. Psalm, which we considered on Ascension-day. In this Psalm we read: "He ascended on high and has received gifts for men;" and St. Peter, referring to these words in his powerful sermon on this day, says: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

This lesson we therefore learn first of all from our text, that the Holy Ghost did not for the first time assume and execute His work and office on the day of Pentecost, but that He has ever been active in His Church. Yet on this glorious festival He for the first time made His workings especially potent and public, that it might become manifest what a precious gift our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ obtained for us by His sufferings and death.

Another lesson we learn from our text. Just as the Scriptures designate the Lord by an especial name, calling Him the Son of God, the Word and the Image of the Father, so they also call the Spirit of God "the Holy Ghost," who inspires, moves and sanctifies the hearts which before were corrupt and full of sins. The Christians therefore rejoice at this name, because they are well aware of their own weakness in the conflict with the devil; they are comforted, however, since they know that they, through Christ, have on their side the Holy Ghost,

who strengthens them against the attacks of the evil spirit, who forgives their sins, and admonishes them to true obedience towards God.

How the Holy Ghost accomplishes this is taught us by Christ Himself, John 16, where He says: "And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The works of the Holy Trinity are therefore distinguished from each other in our Creed, for the purpose of instructing our youth and the unenlightened. We confess that the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, created us for His kingdom and gave us our life and body. After our first parents fell through sin into death, thus bringing upon themselves and all their descendants the punishment of God, Christ the Son of God became man for us, reconciled the Father, and redeemed us by His death from sin and everlasting condemnation. This redemption is now proclaimed by the Holy Ghost to the world through the holy Gospel, whereby the hearts are enlightened and changed, so that they accept the truth and believe that Christ died for them, that an atonement has been made, that their sins are forgiven, and that God is now reconciled in Christ. Thus the hearts are purified and sanctified by faith, as St. Peter declares, Acts 15.

Where there is forgiveness of sins through faith, there we can rejoice and be comforted on account of the death and resurrection of Christ, even though sin is yet in us. There also will follow another manifestation of the Holy Ghost in our life; He will also sanctify our bodies, so that we will not burden our conscience with sin, nor love it and cherish it as before, but will strive to shun it and

to lead a life pleasing to God. Thus St. Paul teaches when he says, Eph. 4: "Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." It is the office and work of the Holy Ghost to create within us a new and true obedience towards God, so that we may withstand sin, crucify the old Adam, and obtain the forgiveness of all our sins through faith.

But this latter sanctification is not so perfect as the former, and is entirely dependent upon it. Our flesh and blood are too weak, and the devil is too powerful to admit of perfect obedience on our part; besides, we have now only the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. But what is wanting in our obedience and holiness is supplied by the other sanctification, in which we have forgiveness of sins through faith, so that we are perfectly just and holy; for the sin and corruption still inhering in us are forgiven. Thus we can understand why the Holy Spirit is so called, namely, because He purifies the believers; that is through the Word He implants in our hearts faith in Christ, whereby we have forgiveness of sins, and begin to be obedient unto God.

The Holy Ghost has yet other appellations from His various manifestations of power in us, all of which pertain to our sanctification. The prophet Zechariah calls Him "Spirit of grace and supplication," because He moves the hearts to trust in God and to cry unto Him for help in every distress. Christ calls Him "Comforter," because He strengthens the hearts to suffer willingly and not to be afraid of any evil, as we saw in the Gospel of last Sunday. Again Christ calls this Spirit "the Spirit

of truth," because He guards us from falsehoods and heresy, and retains us in the Word and true doctrine, against which the devil and our reason argue for the purpose of leading us astray and deceiving us.

Such are the principal works of the Holy Ghost. But He also adorns the faithful with all manner of gifts and virtues and, as Jesus declares, is a Comforter, who remains with us when the world, with its consolation, is powerless and of no effect.

Since the Holy Ghost is sent to work in us such glorious results, it is of importance for us to learn how we can obtain such blessings and the Holy Spirit, so that He may also be active in us and sanctify and save us. Christ our Saviour speaks of this in Luke 11, when He says: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Let us well remember this declaration, and learn that God alone gives the Holy Spirit, that He gives Him only to them who ask for Him, who are earnest in their supplication for His possession. Let then our heartfelt prayer be this: O God, grant us Thy Holy Spirit! Let us not doubt, but continue in such prayer. Christ Himself instructs us to pray thus unto our heavenly Father.

But this prayer, like every other prayer, must be in the name of Jesus. We ought to implore God that He would give us the Holy Ghost for the sake of Jesus Christ, His dear Son. And this we can do without hesitation, as we saw on Ascension-day, because Christ went on high, unto the Father, to obtain for us this gift and to transmit it unto us.

Hence we can pray for it with full assurance. We have both the command to pray for the Holy Spirit and the promise that we shall receive Him; for Christ ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, that He might give us these gifts, which He has obtained from the Father, not indeed for Himself, but for men, as we read in the 68. Psalm.

Yet prayer alone is not sufficient. If we secluded ourselves from others and prayed for the Holy Ghost, neglecting the Word and Sacraments, our prayer would be of little value. For it is God's order that the Holy Ghost shall be efficacious only through the Word and the Holy Sacraments. If we therefore refrain from these means of grace, we will never receive the Holy Spirit. Hence we are baptized, and come to the Lord's Supper, and hear God's Word preached, and desire absolution; for we know that all these are means by which the Holy Ghost accomplishes His work in us. We have many examples to prove this. The three thousand souls who were on this day converted through the preaching of Peter, would have remained in their ignorance and sin all the days of their life, if they had not heard the Gospel; but they did hear the Word, and were moved by it, and were baptized. Christ has moreover ordained it thus. The eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia could not receive the Holy Ghost before Philip had preached the Scriptures unto him. When the Holy Spirit had moved the heart of the eunuch, it was His will that Philip should yet baptize him with water.

If, therefore, we desire to obtain the gift of the

Holy Ghost we must, first of all, pray earnestly for it unto the Father in the name of Christ; then we must diligently use the Word, and remember our promise made in Baptism; we must frequently hear the absolution and go to the Lord's Supper. Through the Word and Sacraments the Holy Ghost is active in our hearts, and enkindles in them a new light, the light of faith, so that we do not simply hear the Word, as did also the obstinate Jews, but retain and understand it, and through it become different persons with renewed hearts.

Finally, it is necessary that we do not hinder the operations of the Holy Ghost in us, or even drive Him entirely from us, by a lawless, wicked life and malicious indulgence of sin. The Holy Spirit cannot occupy the same dwelling with the devil. If therefore the devil torments us with avarice, anger, lewdness, and other sins, let us be quick to pray God for His assistance, that we may overcome these terrible temptations and remain faithful unto Him. If we wish to have and to retain the Holy Spirit, we must avoid such gross sins; or if we through our natural weakness fall into them, we must arouse ourselves speedily, and not be entangled permanently in their meshes.

Then the Holy Spirit is ready to assist us, according to our prayer, in our contest against the devil, our own flesh, and sin. On the other hand, they who consciously give themselves up to sin will be possessed of the devil more and more, nor can they, without repentance, receive the Holy Spirit, whose office it is, as I have already shown, to lead us through faith to the forgiveness of sins, and to help us to resist evil and to grow in grace.

But it is also true, my beloved, as already mentioned, that after all we receive only the first fruits of the Holy Spirit whilst we live in the body here on earth. Hence it happens that they also who have the Holy Spirit are yet weak and often fall into sin. Let no one be offended on this account and say, with the Anabaptists, that he who has the Holy Spirit cannot sin. It is true, if we always heeded the admonitions of the Holy Ghost we would not fall into sin, but it is impossible for us to do this; the devil is too mighty, the wicked world too corrupt, and our flesh and blood are too weak. Therefore we must constantly pray that God in mercy may not take from us His Holy Spirit, that He may retain us in His grace, and daily increase within us the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and forgive us our trespasses, as we entreat in the Lord's Prayer. Even the saints are guilty of trespasses, but through faith in Jesus these are forgiven and become harmless.

Thus we see what the Pentecost of the New Testament is. It is a festival in which the Christians ought to rejoice, because it is far more glorious than that of the Jews. Through Christ the Holy Ghost was poured out upon all flesh, so that we now have a knowledge of God in the light of the Gospel, and can become, by the Holy Spirit, righteous and sanctified in body and soul. Let us to this end be earnest in prayer, in hearing the preaching of the Word of God, and in an unblamable walk before men. May the Holy Spirit, through Christ our Lord, help us in this. Amen.

SECOND SERMON FOR PENTECOST.

JOHN 14, 23-31. Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words : and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings : and the Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father : for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you ; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father ; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

This Gospel is a part of the exhortation which Christ addressed to His disciples on the evening before His sufferings, -and contains words of especial importance. Christ would teach us in these words how vain is the endeavor to obtain a knowledge of God and to come to Him without loving the Saviour. Where this is wanting, our thoughts of God and our devotion are without assurance and we cannot apprehend Him. But if we love Christ we can come to the Father and He will love us.

How is it that Christ here speaks of love and does not say, as He is wont to say : "Believe in me?" Is love more efficacious than faith that He

says: "If a man loves me?" We answer: The sense is the same; man cannot truly love Christ unless he believes in Him and is comforted in Him. The word "love" is in this case plainer and more forcible, because it indicates so nicely, how our hearts should turn from everything else in heaven and on earth, and should cling alone to this Man, Jesus Christ. For we know how love, according to its very nature, concentrates all its energies upon the object of its devotion, and remains attached to it, regardless of aught else in the wide world. It is the Lord's will that we should thus cherish and love Him with our whole heart. This we cannot do except through faith. Hence this declaration concerning love does not in the least detract anything from faith, but rather instructs us as to the true character and efficacy of faith.

The word "love" is also used in this connection, because Christ foresaw with what great difficulties he would have to contend who would receive His Word and persevere in it. Manifold tribulations, which tend to arouse impatience and dissatisfaction, will present themselves. Besides these, the temptation is near at hand to think: I am myself to blame for what I endure; why did I preach and confess the Word publicly? If I had kept my peace and had exercised within myself only the faith in God's Word and His gifts, no one would have molested me, and others, more competent than I, might have more successfully undertaken the task of a public confession and of teaching. Now I am in a great strait, for I am not only unsuccessful in my attempt, but am also in danger of losing my life for it. Such disquieting thoughts and tempta-

tions to despair cannot be overcome and banished from our hearts, nor can we immovably adhere to the Word, unless we have within us that love, of which Christ speaks in our text. Then every preacher, yea, every Christian, can exclaim: Let happen what will, I will nevertheless hold fast to the Word and will never deny my Lord and Saviour; for I enlisted in His cause for His glory, and not to please men, therefore I will endure all to the very end. •

When such love is wanting, we cannot do the will of our Lord unceasingly, for He does not reward us with worldly honors and wealth, but with life everlasting. This is what Christ teaches us here. He tells us: My reward you will obtain in the life to come; therefore you must above all things have love towards me, for then you will adhere to my Word under all circumstances, even at the risk of your life. But if this love is lacking in your hearts you will not keep my Word, but will yield to danger, adversity and tribulation, which will finally plunge you into impatience and despair.

He who knows Christ in true faith and love will not be dismayed at these adversities, but will meet them boldly, convinced of the assistance of his Lord, and strong in the knowledge that He died, was buried, and arose again for us, and that therefore He cannot be opposed to our welfare. Thus love is intimately connected with faith and overcomes all danger and misfortune, without regarding the displeasure and wrath of the world. True love concerns itself about Christ and His Word, and pays no attention to the anger of the world.

Christ refers to this when He says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words." These words are those concerning His death and resurrection, not the word of Moses or the Ten Commandments. These ought also to be revered and obeyed, as God aforetime ordered it, but they contain not the consolation of the Gospel; they do not pacify the conscience, but rather increase the dread and fear of God's displeasure; and this in proportion as we realize our weakness and transgressions. The Word of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, is the greatest and best gift. Christ says of those who possess this treasure and firmly hold to it under all circumstances, that the Father will love them.

It is a peculiarity of St. John, which is not so perceptible in the other Evangelists, to direct people first to Christ, and then through Him to the Father. And thus it must be, as Christ Himself says in our text. We must first know Jesus and love Him; we must have full confidence in His condescension and loving kindness. Where this love and confidence prevail, there there can be no doubt as to the love of the Father toward us. We will then disregard everything else that might disturb us, being assured that God is gracious to us through Christ. We will fear neither sin, the devil nor death, because God loves us, inasmuch as we love Christ.

Surely, this is an unparalleled consolation in every distress. O, that we would but earnestly entertain the knowledge and practice the belief that God is not wroth toward us, but that He kindly smiles upon us because we love Christ and keep His words. Yet it is very difficult for us to have

this faith in our hearts in the time of tribulation. We are too apt to harbor the contrary belief, that God is our enemy and cares not for us, but is ready to slay us. Such thoughts are wrong. Christ speaks the truth when He says: If you love me and keep my words; if you truly rejoice at the fact that I have redeemed you from the thralldom of the devil and the baneful power of sin; if you believe that death shall not devour you, but that eternal life shall be yours according to my Word, then will the Father surely love you also, and will manifest His love by coming with the Son and the Holy Ghost to abide with you.

This is indeed a blessed consolation, that the Christian need not concern himself how he may ascend into heaven. We are in heaven, though we be at Jerusalem, at Rome, in the field or in our houses, or any where else on earth; for God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost will come to us and abide with us. This blessing we have on earth through the Word, and faith brings it into our hearts; but after death we will also be with the Father in heaven.

The abode of God with us on earth secures us His blessing, which He kindly bestows upon all that we do in His fear and love, whether it be that we work, or speak, or suffer, whether we eat or drink, whether we arise or lie down, whether we pray, read, study or sing. This indeed constitutes a kingdom of heaven on earth. Would that we could see it as we should, and believe it. Heaven itself has not this privilege which the Christian has. God does not say that He will dwell in it, but calls it His throne and the earth His footstool. The

heart of the Christian, however, if it believes in Christ and knows, in true faith, that He suffered and died for us and therefore loves Him, shall be an abode of God.

Thus all our welfare depends upon our love of Christ. This love will make all our burdens light, and will alleviate the pains and sorrows which we endure on account of Him and His Word. Else it would be impossible for us not to despair, or to be patient, or to abide with Christ, as He Himself says: "He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings."

Whosoever loves Christ has the promise that the Father, for Christ's sake, will not merely love him also, but that He will even come, together with the Son and the Holy Ghost, to abide with him. This promise is so precious and glorious that we should steadfastly cling to it, and with it we ought to be ready to suffer patiently everything that may befall us. But if we should accept the Gospel from any other motive than the love of Christ, if we should thereby seek only carnal benefits, as the world is so apt to do, then will we, surely, not long continue to keep the Word. It is necessary for us to have this love, if we would remain steadfast in trials and dangers. Money and worldly constraint cannot produce this effect.

If then we desire to be true Christians who adhere to the Word, we should ever be ready with this declaration: We began our undertaking in the name of Christ and to His honor, therefore it cannot fail, whatever may betide us.

Why is it so important that we keep the Word of Christ and be not separated from it in danger or

distress? Because Christ thus continues in our text: "And the Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Christ frequently uses similar expressions, which are indeed of the utmost importance. They contain this doctrine: If man has once accepted Christ in true faith and adheres firmly to His Word, he may rest assured that the true God is his God, and that he needs none other; for God can be fully known only in Christ, as He Himself teaches when He says: "The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." If therefore we accept this Word, we accept the Father; if we believe it, we believe in the Father.

Hence we can judge affairs around us very readily. The Mohammedans, the infidels, the Pope and the Jews, speak much of God, pray often, and claim to be very faithful, but it is clear that they all are far removed from the Father, and know Him not. They keep not the Word of Christ which is that of the Father, in which He proclaims forgiveness of sins and eternal life unto all who have the Son. Yea, we are even persecuted because we teach that men cannot be saved by their own works or merits, but alone through Christ.

The Lord would therefore caution and instruct His disciples in these words which we are now considering. He tells them this: If you would hear God and have Him with you, you must not turn your eyes and ears away from me. If you hear me you hear God; if you see me you see God; for thus it is ordained, that the Father is revealed and made known either through me or else not at all. Hence it is, that when Christ speaks a word of love and

grace the Father approves of it also, yea, it is then spoken by the Triune God, nor can the world or the devil resist its power. The Word of Christ is not His own, but that of the Father, as He distinctly asserts: "The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

These words are so simple that the learned of this world deem them tame and imperfect. They think that such important matters as are implied in these words ought to be more forcibly described. But if we examine carefully these simple and apparently unsatisfactory words, we will find them full of life and consolation.

This we learn from the following words of Christ: "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." It is not the great number of words that makes the teaching plain and intelligible; if the Holy Ghost is not at the same time present with us, all will be obscure.

The remainder of this Gospel contains the conclusion of those comfortable assurances which the Lord gave to His disciples in this entire chapter, namely, that they should rejoice and be glad, and not be offended on account of His shameful death, which would accrue to their great advantage. Of this we treat more fully on the festival of St. Philip and St. James.

Let us then heed the important lesson which Christ teaches us in our Gospel to-day; let us keep the Word of God, and not be turned away from it

by any danger. This we cannot do unless we love Christ; and if we love Him, God will also love us and will make His abode with us. This is the only way to be with God, and whosoever seeks another way besides that of love to Christ, will never see the Father, though he may suffer much and do many good works. They are all in vain.

Inasmuch as Christ tells us: "The Word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me," it behooves every one to reject all words and doctrines which do not proceed from His lips. If we do this, we are sure to find God and to have His blessings, of which we would otherwise be entirely destitute. But, alas! it is now as it was in the Old Testament with the Jews. They had the mercy-seat in the tabernacle; there they were commanded to pray and to worship, and nowhere else; but instead of complying with this command they selected other places as they wished, and worshiped there. Thus it is to-day. Christ however says: If ye would find the Father and be beloved by Him, come first to me, love me, and accept my Word.

Do the Anabaptists, the Jews, the Turks and the Pope comply with this instruction? No, verily! They deny Christ and His Word, and follow human traditions. The Pope trusts in the mass, in vows, in the assistance of dead saints. The Anabaptist trusts in outward observances and discipline, in the style of his coat and in his refusal to carry arms. The Jews and Mohammedans have likewise their nostrums. Let us, my beloved, avoid this great mistake; let us come to Christ alone and keep His Word, for the command is plain: "Him shall ye hear." And Christ says in our text: "The words

which ye hear are my Father's words." It is therefore impossible that any one could come to God and be pleasing unto Him who does not first hear Christ and love Him.

May our Father in heaven grant us grace that we may love Christ and keep His Word through the Holy Ghost, so that we may obtain eternal salvation. Amen.

WHIT-MONDAY.

JOHN 3, 16-21. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

This Gospel is one of the most precious passages in the whole New Testament, and fully deserves, if it could be done, to be written with golden letters into our hearts. Every Christian ought to learn this consoling text by heart, and should repeat it once at least each day, so that we would know these words well and could readily apply them for our consolation and the strengthening of our faith. They are words which have power to gladden us when we are sad and to bring us back to life when we are dead, if we but accept them earnestly in true faith. But inasmuch as it is impossible for us to comprehend fully and to express properly the contents of this glorious text, let us pray earnestly unto God to impress these words deeply upon our hearts through His Holy Spirit, so that they may become powerful in us, and may give us much joy and consolation, Amen.

The sum and substance of this glorious, comfortable and blessed passage is this, that God loved the

world so dearly that He gave His only begotten Son to save men from eternal death and to give them everlasting life. Christ our Lord speaks to us, as it were, in these words: Heed what I tell you of a peculiar, unheard-of occurrence; yea, I will point you to a great, precious and valuable treasure, which is totally unlike any earthly gifts, by which you can now be rich and blessed for evermore. All the circumstances connected with the bestowal and reception of this precious gift are so peculiar and overwhelmingly grand that human thoughts cannot compass them, and much less can our words express their great importance.

If we consider first the Giver of this blessing, we find that the text says nothing of emperors, kings, or other dignitaries of the world, but it speaks of God Himself, who is incomprehensible and omnipotent, who has created everything through His Word, who has all and preserves all and is over all, compared with whom all creation, heaven and earth, with all they contain, is but as an insignificant grain of sand. He, the Almighty, is the great Giver of all blessings, and His gifts are so glorious that the most valued treasures of men, of emperors and kings, fade away into nothingness when compared with the mercies of God. Let us, therefore, rejoice greatly and sing for gladness in view of these blessings, and let us consider as mere trifles everything else that the world can bestow. What indeed can be greater or more glorious than the Almighty Himself!

This God, who is infinite and ineffable, manifests His loving kindness in a degree beyond all measure. What He gives He gives not as something merited,

or because it is His duty to give it, but simply, as our text says, through love. He is a Giver who begrudges not His gifts, but delights in bestowing them; He gives on account of endless, divine love, as Christ says: "For God so loved the world."

There is no other virtue so glorious as love. What we dearly love we are ready to defend and protect at the risk of our life. Patience, chastity, temperance, &c., are also praiseworthy virtues, but cannot be compared with love; she is queen over them all, and comprehends them all. Surely if one is pious and righteous, he will not defraud or injure his brother, but will assist him in everything; but if we love a person, we are ever ready to devote ourselves entirely to his welfare and to assist him, according as he has need, with our counsel and our possessions. Thus, as Christ declares in our text, does God also do toward us. He gives us blessings beyond measure, not because He is patient or because we are righteous and deserve it, but through love, the greatest of all virtues. In view of this fact our hearts should awake, all our sadness should vanish, for we see before us the inexhaustible love of the divine heart, which we ought to cherish in true faith as the greatest of all gifts, knowing that God is the highest and most glorious Giver of blessings unto us, and that they all proceed from the greatest of all virtues.

The fact that anything is given from true love makes the gift itself greater and more precious. If therefore we are convinced that love prompts the bestowal of any gift, we are well pleased; but when we doubt the existence of this motive in the giver, we care but little for his gift. Thus if God had

given us only one eye or one foot and we were convinced that fatherly love prompted Him to do this, we would be entirely content and better satisfied than we would otherwise be if we had a hundred eyes and a hundred feet.

But the words are plain: God so loved the world. Therefore we ought to value highly, on account of His love, all His gifts, especially those which He has ordained to our salvation and the strengthening of our faith, as Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, &c. These gifts appear not brilliant before the world, yet unto us they are heaven itself, and make us glad and cheerful because they flow from the love of our Father toward us and are instituted for our benefit. Therefore Christ in this connection not only teaches us that God will give us something, but also in what manner He will do this, namely, through divine, fatherly love.

Thus we see how great and ineffable are the Giver and the motive which prompts Him to grant us His blessings. But the gift itself is equally glorious and inexpressible. We hear from our text that God through love does not give us a dollar, a horse, a cow, an eye, a kingdom, or even the heavens with the sun and stars, nor the whole creation, but He gives us "His only begotten Son," who is like unto Himself in everything.

This gift must surely arouse within us the deepest emotions of happiness, so that our hearts will ever be glad and leap for joy. Even as the Giver, God Himself, is endless and incomprehensible in His love, so the gift itself, His Son, is eternal and unspeakable. God in this gift bestows Himself with

all that He is, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The victory over the devil, sin death and hell, as well as the gift of heaven, righteousness and eternal life, is ours; yea all things are ours now, because we have the Son as our gift, in whom all else is comprehended.

If we then truly believe in this gift and accept it in real faith, all creation, be it good or evil, be it life or death, heaven or hell, must be at our service, as St. Paul in another place says: "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." 1 Cor. 3. Indeed, if we fully consider this gift, we must confess and say that it is a boon which in value transcends all else in heaven and earth, and in comparison with which all treasures in the world are as a mite to a mountain of gold. But alas, our miserable unbelief and the terrible darkness which enshrouds us, as Christ Himself shortly after this complains, prevents our hearts from realizing what a blessing we have in this gift of the Son of God; we hear these glorious words, but they rush by our outward ears, and the heart remains cold and cheerless. When we hear of a house or farm which is for sale on easy terms, we run and are as eager to make the purchase as if our existence depended upon it; but when the glorious Gospel is preached, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for its salvation, we are shamefully and sinfully careless and lazy about hearing and accepting this blessed

truth. Who is at the bottom of this wicked indifference and carelessness as to the greatest gift, so that we do not accept it nor derive from it joy and consolation? No one but the old devil himself; he blinds our hearts to such a degree that we permit the preaching of this precious Gospel to go by unheeded, while we in the meanwhile busy ourselves with temporal cares.

For this reason I remarked, at the beginning of this sermon, that we ought to repeat these words when we get out of bed in the morning and again when we retire in the evening, so that we may know them right well and praise God for His unutterable blessings. For surely all, the Giver, His love, and the gift bestowed so undeservedly, simply through love, are most glorious and beyond our comprehension. The gift is one freely given, and will ever remain a gracious blessing which cannot be borrowed, lent nor bought; all we have to do to obtain it is to hold out our hand and to receive willingly and gladly this treasure. Alas, that our hands and hearts are so reluctant and even unwilling to take such a glorious gift, which is so freely offered, and which is designed to be ours for evermore.

What shall those people be called who refuse to accept a kind gift and blessing? Suppose a poor, ragged beggar, nearly exhausted with hunger, meets with a great and charitable prince, who offers to give him a residence and a great yearly income, and to make him a lord, but that the beggar haughtily turns away from his benefactor without accepting his kindness, what would this foolish man be called by the world? Surely everybody

would say that he is crazy and acts more like a brute than a human being. This would be the verdict of the world. Here, however, there is offered to the world no palace nor principality, no kingdom nor imperial domain, but the Son of God, and God Himself urges the world to accept and keep this gift. But alas, we men are the ones who refuse to accept this gift; we turn our backs upon God, the kind Giver. From this we can judge what a great and horrible sin unbelief is, for it is not natural that men should refuse a gift and willingly turn from it.

This proves how mad and thoughtless the world is; she does not rejoice at this gift of God, and refuses to receive it when offered. No doubt she would be quick to stretch out her hands for it if it were a dollar or a new coat; but as it is the Son of God every one acts as if the gift were valueless.

"The world" is mentioned by name in this connection as the ungrateful one who spurns this gift which is offered to her freely. For what has the world done to merit such love and mercy of God? Nothing at all. She is the devil's bride, the greatest enemy of God and the greatest blasphemer. Yet we read here: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

My hearer, inscribe this truth deeply in your heart. And since you have now heard who God is, and what His gift is, which He gives alone through love, hear also what the world is. She is constituted of a multitude of people who do not believe in God and who make Him a liar; yea, they blaspheme His name and Word, and persecute it. Hence they are those who disobey father and mother,

who are murderers, adulterers, treacherous persons, thieves, hypocrites, and the like, as we, alas, can see but too clearly every day of our life. The world is full of falsehood and blasphemy. Nevertheless God, through love, gives His Son to this bride of the devil, His greatest foe and persecutor.

This fact also magnifies the gift. God does not regard the sins and crimes of the world, nor her persecution of His name and Word, so as to withhold His gift on that account. It would seem as if God were too holy and His gift too precious to endure the perversion and wickedness of the world. But God does not regard the sins of the world, whether they be against the first or against the second table of the law, as too great to permit the manifestation of His love toward her; yea, on account of her sins and great misery, in which we all would have to perish if God did not grant us His help, He is merciful, and prompted by His love He comes to our assistance.

Ought we then not to love such a merciful God in return and to trust implicitly in Him who forgives sins, and will not suffer the ungrateful world to perish for her transgressions, which are innumerable? Yea, the sins of every one of us are innumerable; who then could enumerate the sins of the whole world? Yet we read that God is ready to forgive all our transgressions; for from the love of God comes the forgiveness of sins. We ought to consider this attentively. If God gives so much, yea even Himself to the world, which is His natural enemy, we are forced to conclude that His mercy and grace will also manifest itself toward us, no matter what our experiences are during this life.

Therefore we ought to trust in this love, and hope for every blessing from God for Christ's sake.

Such thoughts must encourage the heart and make it glad. I and many Christians have to confess that while we were in popery we lived in great wickedness and idolatry, and were guilty of many a sin. God however did not punish such wickedness as we deserved, but manifested His love by revealing again through the Gospel His Son, whom He had given to the world. We were again permitted to hear and to understand the glorious Gospel, proclaiming that God is not wroth with the world, but that He loves us and has given His Son in our behalf. Alas, we are ungrateful and do not realize this truth as we should, else would our hearts be filled with joy, and we would be determined not only to serve God right willingly, but also to suffer without complaint everything in His service, on account of the precious treasure which we have. It is our unbelief which prevents such joy and seeks the pleasures of the world, which come from the devil and are accursed.

We have now considered four parts in our text, namely, the Giver of the gift, the gift itself, how it is given, and to whom it is given. It is impossible to express fully in words the great importance of these four considerations.

Now follows the *causa finalis*, what purpose God has in view in the bestowal of this gift. It contains no outward advantages for us; we are neither clothed by it, nor fed, nor sheltered: much less is it injurious to our bodies; it contains no poison. Thus He gives His Word, Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, not to our injury but to our sal-

vation. This gift of the only begotten Son is granted unto us to this end, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

From this declaration we learn that this gift does not bring us money, goods, honor or power in this world, for all such benefits would be but transitory. Yea, if we had all these things we would nevertheless still be under the dominion of the devil. But now when the Son of God is given us, through the Father's love toward us, it follows that we are freed from sin, death and hell, if we believe in the Saviour; for He crushed the head of the serpent and despoiled it of its power; He slew sin and devoured death and extinguished the fire of hell, so that they are all vanquished for evermore and deprived of their supremacy over us. So great and glorious was this gift. Honor, praise and glory be unto God, the merciful Giver of this blessing, for ever and for ever, Amen.

Surely we have reason enough to feel happy at this occurrence, especially since Christ Himself asserts in our text that He was given us to overpower hell and to make our timid hearts bold and full of cheerfulness. Through the firm assurance that we have a reconciled God in heaven, who loves us and who through love gave His Son for us, so that we should not perish but have everlasting life, we are made glad; for we know that death has now no authority over us, and that eternal life is ours in Christ.

This truth we cannot learn or understand too well; therefore we ought to pray every day that

God may through His Holy Spirit inscribe these words deeply in our hearts, that these may be illumined and enlivened thereby. Then will we become true theologians, who know Christ aright and adhere to His doctrine, prepared to suffer for this faith all ills and adversities which, in the providence of God, may visit us. But inasmuch as we do not value these words as we should, and only hear them with our outward ears, they cannot prove their power in our hearts; we remain to-day as we were yesterday, and it is a sin and a shame that we see not with our eyes nor hear with our ears. Most certainly will the damned cry out on the day of judgment and lament, because they were so careless about the preaching and hearing of these words of consolation while yet on earth.

Let us now consider in what way this glorious gift ought to be received, in what receptacle this precious treasure should be securely laid and guarded. It is of great importance to know this. Christ Himself points it out to us in the words: "That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

This testimony is plain and clear. It declares that faith, that is, a firm confidence in the mercy and love of God in Christ, is the receptacle into which we should receive and in which we should keep the gift of the Son of God. Love and mercy prompt God to give us such a boon, while we can receive and retain it only through faith. No work or merit of ours avails us anything in this; for even our best works are worthless in this regard. We must stretch forth our hands in faith; and as God through love is the Giver, so we must through faith

in Christ be the receivers of His gift. We must believe what our text tells us, that God is kind and merciful and that He manifests His love toward us in sending His only begotten Son into our flesh and blood, to take upon Himself our sins, as John the Baptist and the prophet Isaiah declare: "This is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." With such a gift, and assured of the love of God, we can stay our hearts against the assaults of sin and the accusations of our conscience; for we know that He is not wroth nor terrible, but that for Christ's sake He is kind and gracious unto us. Whoever believes this is truly happy and blessed, for this gift is so great and powerful that it crushes sin, death and every evil. As a burning fire devours a little drop of water, thus are the sins of the whole world annihilated when they come in contact with Christ; yea, if we cling to Him in faith, our sins will be removed and destroyed, even as a straw is devoured in a mighty conflagration.

Christ Himself tells us in our Gospel: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The words "whosoever believeth in Him" are of especial importance here. Christ says nothing at all of good works as means unto salvation. Faith alone can and must receive this gift. Therefore we are undisturbed by the noise of our adversaries; we cling firmly to this doctrine, for here it is said: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." If we doubt this, or change it, we accuse Christ of falsehood and set ourselves up as judges over Him.

What glorious words of consolation and eternal life! God grant that we may faithfully receive them into our hearts. Whoever has accepted them in faith will not fear the devil, nor sin, nor death, but will exclaim, in great joy and firm assurance: I am comforted, for I now have the Son of God given unto me through the Father's love toward the world. This I firmly believe, because the Word of God, the holy Gospel, thus declares it unto me. And Thy Word, O God, and Thy Son Jesus Christ cannot lie; this I know and believe. Wherein I am weak in faith, give me strength to receive and to retain this Thy great gift and love, else it will be of no advantage unto me. It behooves us therefore to become more and more acquainted with this gift and to be comforted by it; this however can only take place through faith, as Christ teaches us. The stronger our faith, the greater will be our happiness and safety, so that we can cheerfully do and suffer what God imposes upon us, and this because we know that He is merciful and full of love toward us.

Perhaps you will object and say: Yea, if I were as pious and holy as Peter, Paul, or the holy Virgin, then would I dare to believe and be comforted with this gift. They were saints, and no doubt for them this gift was intended, but I, a poor sinner, have no right to appropriate it unto myself, for I have so often and in such manifold ways offended and opposed God. Such thoughts cannot be avoided when we hear this Gospel, and then think of our condition and great transgressions. But we must watch that these thoughts do not gain such power over us that we lose sight of the Gospel; to this

we must speedily return and in this find comfort. Such thoughts are really nothing but unbelief, which would keep us from this gift and its comfortable assurance of the forgiveness of our sins through faith in Christ.

Unbelief, however, can be successfully combated only with the Word of God. Christ our Saviour gives unto us this Word, so that we dare not doubt its truthfulness. He tells us that His Father in heaven, the everlasting God, so loved "the world," that He even gave for it His only begotten Son. Now it is evident that the expression "the world" does not mean Mary, Peter, Paul, &c., but that it includes the whole human race, one and all, without any exception. Or have you any doubt that you are a human being? If so, feel your chest or your nose, and you will find out whether you are different from other people. Why then will you persistently exclude yourself from the application of this expression "world," when Christ so plainly includes in it all men, and does not apply it merely to the virgin Mary, to St. Peter, or to St. Paul? If you and I refuse to accept Christ, because we think that we have no part in Him, we make Him a liar, for He said that He was given for the whole world. No, we must rather come to the opposite conclusion, that we have as good a right to this gift as Peter or Paul, or any one else has, simply because we are men, and as such a part of the world. Let us therefore beware and not doubt God's words by thinking that we cannot be sure whether we belong to those, to whom and for whom He gave His Son that they might have everlasting life. With such thoughts we deny that God speaks the truth.

Let us therefore shun such doubts, and the thoughts producing them, as we would shun the very devil himself. Let us be firm in faith and say : We know that God gave His gift not only to Peter and Paul, for if He had desired to bestow it only upon those perfectly worthy of it, He would have given it to the holy angels, who are pure, undefiled spirits, or to the sun and moon, which obey perfectly the law of God by continuing in their prescribed course ; but we read otherwise, namely, that "God gave His Son unto the world." Therefore we all have a part in this glorious gift, just as well as David or any apostle. Who was David ? Did he not commit gross sins ? Who were the apostles ? Were they not all sinners and unworthy of this gift ?

Let no one, therefore, reason thus : I am a sinner, and am not as holy as St. Peter, consequently I dare not appropriate this gift to my consolation. Far be it from us to harbor such thoughts. Let us believe in God's Word implicitly ; and because He says that He gave this gift unto the world, let us all, since we belong to the world, no matter who we are, lay hold of it in faith ; for if we do not, we deny the truthfulness of God, and thereby commit a great and damnable sin.

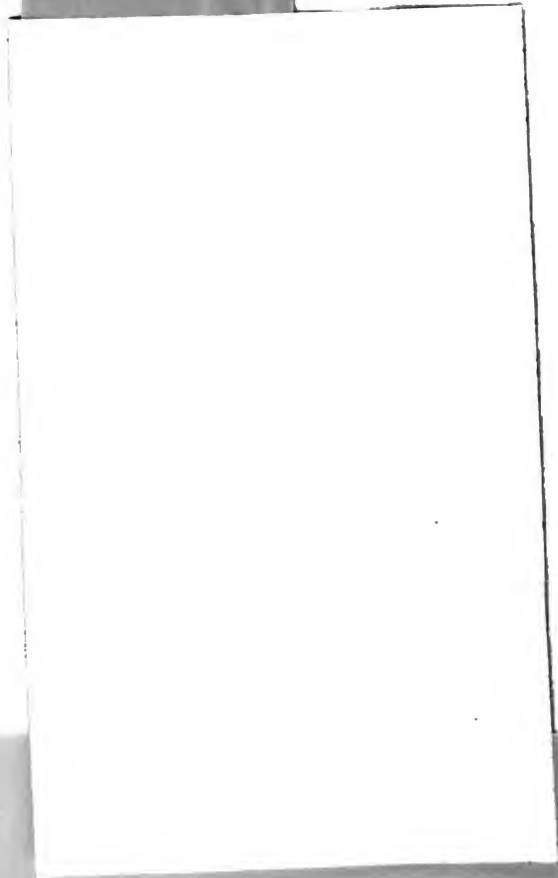
Some perhaps might think : If God had told this unto me especially, I would believe it and be assured that it also applies to me. In this you err, my friend ; God intentionally speaks in a general way, and says that He gave His Son unto the whole world, that all may be saved and none be excluded. If there are any who are not benefited by this gift, they are themselves to blame ; they exclude them-

selves, through wicked unbelief, from the blessing of the gift of God, and will have to render an account for their faithlessness; yea, their own words will condemn them. Besides, we have the holy Sacraments, instituted of Christ Himself, to be employed by us as means of grace, by which we are to obtain and to appropriate to ourselves this gift.

This is a brief and simple explanation of our beautiful and precious text to-day, which is so comprehensive that it can never be exhausted. It contains the chief doctrine of salvation, that God, through love towards the wicked world, gave His only begotten Son to be its Saviour. Let every one learn what a glorious treasure and consolation the Christians have, who God is, and what the world is, and how through faith we can obtain and enjoy this mercy, as Christ says: "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." The doctrine concerning good works and their relation to faith cannot be considered in this connection, and will receive attention at some other time. Here we must consider what God gives unto us and how we ought to receive His gift.

Christ does not dwell here upon the duties which a Christian must fulfill to prove himself an obedient, beloved child of God, nor does He speak of the necessary gratitude for the love of God and the gift of eternal life. It suffices, therefore, if we in this connection restrict our consideration to the mercy of God, and to the truth that we are saved alone through this grace, which must be accepted in true faith, and with which good works on our part have nothing to do; for we are saved only

through the love of God who gave His only begotten Son for us, for whose sake He now forgives us all our sins. God grant us His grace, that we may believe this truth and be happy in it in life and in death. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.



LUTHER, Martin
[Sermons.]

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